M Lane

# THE ROUÉ.

Were you, ye fair, but cautious whom ye trust,
So many of your sex would not in vain,
Of broken vows and faithless men complain.

*Rowe.*

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

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# THE ROUÉ.

## CHAPTER I.

### WOMAN.

Love is a friend—lust a tyrant.

Love is the tyrant of the heart; it darkens
Reason, confounds discretion, deaf to counsel;
It runs a headlong course to desperate madness.
FORD.

### LESLIE TO VILLARS.

FRED, Fred, Fred—I am plunging "deeper and deeper still," as the poet says. This Agnes—I must call her Agnes—for I hate that name which gives her propriety to another person—has fastened upon me with a tenacity unequalled even by the little hunchbacked man whom we detested so much in Sinbad the Sailor.

Look which way I will, her form is present to my imagination. Sleeping and waking—idle or occupied—restless or reposing, it is all the same. Out of her sight, a sickening impatience for her society: in her presence, a restless irritation—a maddening impulse—a kind of *furor amandi*, that tingles to my fingers' ends; and a most irrepressible inclination to knock every one down who addresses her, not excepting her husband, who has paid the price of his liberty for the privilege.

Are not these symptoms? strong, convincing, damnable symptoms, Fred? I am afraid they are; and as many times as I have felt them before, I never yet felt them so strongly, so forcibly, so madly, as now; and the worst is, that the inclination has grown, and grown; and I have cherished it.

and cherished it—till, like the lion's whelp, it threatens to eat up its nurse.

Then the absurd laws here pronounce this to be wrong; and I am doomed in her presence every Sunday to hear her and the whole congregation pray against this same feeling which is devouring my very heart; and yet I can't keep out of church, while I know my divinity is there. So you see I am growing good, Fred. Surely there must be some mistake in the history of my birthplace. I never could have been born in this cold country, subject to these November laws: I must rather owe my birth to more tolerant France —to warmer Italy—or to some of those climates where, as old Dryden says—

> The sun with rays directly darting down
> Fires all beneath, and FRIES the frigid zone.

Prometheus must certainly have amused himself by throwing an extra quantum of gas into my composition; and like other gas, compressed into too small a space, it will have its way, even though it blows up the gasometer. And what is the human frame but a gasometer, of which the senses are the apertures for ignition? If they did not catch fire, Fred —aye, and burn out—why they would stink.

So what is the use of arguing? I tell you woman is my destiny—from my boyish days to the present—through our exercises at Eton—through our studies at Oxford—at our first initiation into society—at our temporary expulsion from it—and at my re-entrance into it—thou knowest that woman—woman—woman—has been my only object; and so she will be to the end of the chapter. I know every description of them—have studied their passions, their minds, their vanities, and find the last the strongest, and the very best weapon to wound or win them with.

And can you wonder at this predilection? Ought our sires, our elders, or our tutors, to wonder at it, when every part of our education tends to the inculcation of that passion which is inspired by the dear—the damnable—the delightful sex?

What are the first ideas engendered in our minds by the books which are put into our boyish hands, at the very commencement of our education? at the very budding of our youthful passions? at the very moment when sparks are

growing into flames, and when embers are fanned into fire in our constitutions?

Look at the Satires of Juvenal—the first book of Lucretius—the Odes of Horace and Catullus—the Idylliums of Theocritus—and above all, the Epistles and Metamorphoses of old Ovid. Is it not all love? all procreation? and are not all these school-books? the very foundation of our minds—the first pursuits to which we are directed? Why, even the very flowers, Fred—the innocent flowers—with their stamens, and pistils, their polyandria, and their polygamia—with all their innocence, according to Linnæus, set us the same example.

> What beaux and beauties crowd the gaudy groves,
> And woo and win (not wed, Fred,) their vegetable loves!
> There the young rose in beauty's damask pride
> Drinks the warm blushes of his bashful bride;
> With honey'd lips enamour'd woodbines meet,
> Clasp with fond arms, and mix their kisses sweet,
> While from on high the bursting *anthers* trust
> To the mild breezes their prolific dust;
> Or bend in rapture o'er the central fair,
> Love out their hour, and leave their lives in air.

This is natural philosophy. Then look to history. Do you think the precocious schoolboy ever connects the Rape of the Sabines with Malthus on Population? and what must he naturally think when he finds in the next page these very ladies pleading the cause of their rude ravishers—and that they can

> Hug the offender, and forgive the offence?

What can they think but that,

> Indulgent to the wrongs which they receive,
> The sex can suffer what they dare not give?

Yes, Romulus was a true politician as well as a great general. He not only made conquests abroad, but provided subjects at home—and like a kind soul

> Took care the commonwealth should multiply,
> Providing Sabine women for his braves,
> Like a true king, to get a race of slaves.

Alas! there is no necessity for modern sovereigns to employ their subjects in this manner.

Look again at the histories of Anthony and Cleopatra—Telemachus and Calypso—Paris and Helen—Pericles and Aspasia; and a thousand other lovers of all sorts and nations, that glow from the title-page to the finis in our school-books, and from the alpha to the omega of our education: and do they think, that with these *exempla profana* before our eyes, we can "turn over a new leaf," as the old women say? and even if we did, why we should find another story of the same nature in the next page. Look through the ancient mythology, where even the gods themselves had their pandars, and their procuresses. Is not their whole history, from Jupiter down to the Cyclops, one tissue of amorous adventure? and do you not remember when we have read the tales of Europa, of Danae, of Leda, and the hundred other little *passetemps* of the bearded Jupiter, how we envied him his powers of metamorphosis and ubiquity much more than we ever did that power which,

When he shook his head, could shake the firmament?

or all the deep-mouthed thunder with which he could hurl his vengeance on the poor mortals who had excited his anger, by following his example? Indeed, the principal use of his thunder seems to have been to silence Juno, when her goddess-ships's jealousy degenerated into mere womanly scolding: and certainly it is a weapon which might be very useful to mortals for similar purposes.

But these you will say are indeed the mere *exempla profana;* but look to the *sacra*, and see if the matter be at all mended in the histories of Mrs. Potiphar and the two Miss Lots. But as there are so many subjects from which to illustrate my position, without infringing upon those which are considered sacred, and as it has ever been a maxim with me that those are but weak wits who indulge themselves in veins that are only pleasant, because they run in a current contrary to generally received opinions, let us keep, Fred, in the beaten track of the amatory classical.

Vivan le femmine—

say I—look, Fred, at all the other pursuits of life—what is ambition but the king's evil? a path of thorns—a mountain, up which a man rolls his tub like Sisyphus, only to have it

roll back again when he thinks he has attained the summit; and finds that he would have done wiser to have filled it with wine, and get drunk upon it at the bottom, than in getting morally intoxicated with its emptiness at the top.

What is prudence but avarice? an amassing the means of pleasure without the spirit for its enjoyment; a cellar of wine with one's thirst unsatisfied. Then gambling too, that worst—that ungentlemanly spirit of gain—that sordid pursuit, in which a man's soul is set upon a dice or a card, in which his excitement depends upon a guinea, and in which all the sensations of existence are comprised in the two of winning and losing. From my soul I despise your spirit that can be roused into delight, or plunged into despair, by the exclamations of *rouge gagne*, or *sept perde*, and think, that the gambler's fate deservedly ends in suicide and ruin.

Then glory—what is it, Fred, but broken heads and bloody noses—amputated limbs and gun-shot wounds—sabre cuts and bayonet thrusts? All to be recompensed by a blue riband, a tinsel star, or a statue in the Abbey.

> Can honour mend an arm or a leg?

says good sensible fat Falstaff. No—no, Fred.

The madness of our youth, it is true, drove us into the field: and, as far as I recollect, we have heard the balls whiz round us as thick as hailstones. But is any body fool enough to suppose that we did it for glory? no, no—we were too wise. In every bullet, we earned another claim to woman's favour. In every attack, we thought alone on the effect of our conduct on some dear delightful woman; and in the midst of the charge, with the blood of the dead and the groans of the dying arising round us, we thought alone of some tender bosom—or rather of the many tender bosoms that

> Should love us for the dangers we had passed,
> While we lov'd them that they did pity them.

Poor souls! and we have realized these anticipations in many more cases than one—havn't we, Fred? and shall again, shan't we, Fred?

Then there's philosophy. Now, Fred, in the name of wonder what is the use of philosophy? Your philosopher, as Morton's farce says, "dies while he lives, that he may live after he is dead." Is this common sense? To what use,

now, do you suppose I have put the figure of Atlas, which I purchased when we were last together at Florence, in this very library from whence I am writing? Why, I have tasked his broad shoulders to support that world of controversy which has kept philosophers at loggerheads ever since the birth of philosophy. And who, in the name of wonder, is to be guided by theorists whose systems have been overturned as soon as they have appeared? Look through them all, ancients and moderns: Aristotle wrote against Plato; Descartes against Gassendi; Locke against Mallebranche; Arnaud against Claude; and Le Clerc against Baille: and the practice of mankind, and the great machine of the universe, go on just the same as though they had never written at all.

Voltaire, Rousseau, Boileau, and some others of that school, had indeed a higher aim, and you know how hard we try to believe their systems, and, sensible as they are, how very difficult we find it to do so? yet we act upon them, Fred, and that is as much as we can do; and the more we act, the more we become convinced of their truth. Indeed, if this were not the case, I am afraid we should cut but sorry figures in our hours of reflection; and even a man of pleasure must have his hours of reflection—they enable him to mature his plans in progress, to project new and break up old ones, and they give a zest to the *plaisirs bruyants du grand monde* by their contrasts. I despise your mere momentary pleasure, that starts into existence like some of those *ephemeræ* engendered in the first beam of the setting sun, and which die before its last ray has quitted the highest mountain. I love to anticipate; I love to remember. It is true we are not yet reduced, like old debauchees, to the pleasures, or rather the curses, of anticipation and memory; our delights are still the tangible and the palpable; but to press the past and the future into the service of the present, is the highest and truest philosophy of enjoyment. Don't you think so. Fred?

Having thus disposed of ambition, riches, and philosophy, and proved their futility in the grand pursuit of life—pleasure! where shall we look for it? Where, Fred? Why, where we have often found it, in dear, lovely woman! and again I exclaim with Giovanni—*Vivan le femmine.* Giovanni!—aye, but I do not mean the sing-song Giovanni of Mozart, with his solos, duettos, and recitatives; but the Giovanni *véritable et original* of the old Spanish story, who returns the commen-

datore's visit, and sups with his ghostship in his charnel-house, entertained by the music of demons, waited upon by the animated marble statues of the tombs, and regaled with goblets of blue flame—as we saw it represented at Seville—till the iron grasp of the spirit drags him down to —— where we must leave him for the present.

Cousin Hartley, the cold and prudent Hartley, trusts, with a grave face, that I have travelled to study mankind. Was that our pursuit, Fred? I don't think it was. No, no; Pope may say the truest study of mankind is man—but give me woman! No ethereal angel cut out of a cloud, with a moonbeam for a petticoat, girdled with a rainbow, and kerchiefed with a piece of blue sky; but dear, tangible, palpable, lovely woman; a form in which passion is fed by sentiment, fire tempered by softness; all that Rousseau could imagine, Byron describe, or Titian paint.

I don't mean your patrician beauties, your dignified Portias, Cornelias, and Volumnias, whose solemn virtue kept one at as great a distance from their persons as the hoops of our grandmothers did; and who would no more have been elected at Almack's, than Cicero, Seneca, and Cato, would have escaped being blackballed at Crockford's.

It is not these statue-like models of perfection in the female form that I love, but the dear modern sex, who drive to Howel and James's at noon, to the Park in the evening, to the Opera at night, and to the church in the morning; who will ruin their husbands at the one, and themselves at the others. Oh, would that Agnes were one of these! There; there again! her name *will* drop from my pen. Wherever my mind's eye turns, these five magical letters, A-G-N-E-S, seem written in characters of fire. But I am describing a genus, not a person; and Agnes, thou art not of this genus!

How that name distracts me! Where was I? oh, at women—when was I ever at anything else?—the general run of women; and where the devil will they not run to, aye, and make us run after them?

I thought I had known them all; thought I had discovered all their weak points: you know I have been successful, and I have looked back through all my manœuvres, but I find none applicable to my present purpose. Agnes, as I said before, is of no genus; and I must have a plan peculiarly adapted to her peculiarities.

With most, I have found flattery my best pioneer: for

though a base coin, it is very passable pocket-money, as well in love as at court, and in both has, by custom and consent, obtained so many receivers, that it goes almost as far, and sometimes procures as much as the legal currency of truth and honesty. Indeed, flattery, as somebody says, is made to sit in the par our, while honesty is turned out of doors. Why, therefore, should we be at the pains of hunting out after truths, or working hard for real gold, when a little easy invention, and a little specious imitation, a little or-molu, will answer all our purposes; and if, according to English law, it makes the receiver as bad as the thief, why we are both equal, and we can't help it.

But she—*my* she, I mean—is proof against all this. A word of flattery would be perdition to her good opinion: her estimate of herself is too just to permit it the slightest chance of success. Nay, I dare not even venture upon that kind of collateral flattery which that cunning tub-proprietor, Diogenes, used with so much effect, and which we have sometimes adroitly conveyed through the abuse and ridicule of a rival or a superior. Diogenes was a cunning fellow; he professed to be no flatterer, but his cynic raillery was, in other words, flattery; it fed the ruling passion of the mob, who were more pleased to hear their superiors abused than themselves commended.

Then, as to person, she is perfectly insensible to the charms of her own; or if she feels them, she is merely thankful, without valuing herself one jot the more for their possession. Now with some, nay, with most of the sex, as you and I know, Fred, it is far more safe to lower any pretensions that a woman may aspire to on the score of her virtue, than those *dearer* ones which she may foster on the score of her vanity. You may tell her with safety she is not in the exact road to gain the approbation of angels; but should you dare to hint to her that she is equally unsuccessful in her methods to obtain the admiration of men, Heaven help us, what a volley of abuse should we draw down from their pretty lips!

As to the other plans of attack; your odes and sonnets, Fred; words spun out of our rhyming brains into namby-pamby poems, interlarded with scraps of plagiarism, roses mingled with sunbeams, mixtures of moonlight with melancholy, and the whole et-cetera of trash that flows through so many broad streams of margin in the publications of modern poets—they won't do for her. You might as well attempt

to catch an elephant in a mouse-trap, or to fix a tiger with birdlime. And as to sighs, why if you could build a bridge of them, a whole *Ponte Sospiri* would not lead you to her arms.

No, Fred, this won't do for her: and yet her soul is all music; her feelings all poetry; and there must be some master-chord to command its harmony, though I have not yet been able to strike it.

It used to be an observation of yours, Fred, aye, and of this very Trevor, though he has forgotten it, and I do not particularly wish to bring it to his memory in any other way than practically, that I had taken as much pains to make a science of seduction as Euclid did of mathematics; and so I have, and, like Euclid, have solved many of my propositions by an absurdity. I was wont to set down before a woman as a general before a fortified town; examine the outworks; draw my line of circumvallation with a modest demeanour and an air of respect; make my advances under a masked battery; draw up my forces of flattery and sentiment; throw in a warm poem or sentimental novel by way of hand-grenades; till at length the counterscarp gave way; the outworks were surrendered; a parley took place; and the citadel fell. I used to think that nothing could resist the patience which waited for, the boldness which hazarded, and the address which produced the lucky moment. But in this instance all our tactics are set at defiance. It is impossible to be patient. Boldness is of no utility; and there is not the remotest chance of the lucky moment to give the opportunity for the exertion of one's address.

Yet I must succeed, Fred, if it is only out of respect to the characters of those who have gone before; must not I? It would not be fair to let one of the sex triumph over the rest by a successful resistance, would it? Oh, woman! woman! what a vast variety of sin hast thou to answer for? Who seduces us from the paths of rectitude?—woman! Who distracts our attention from the pursuits of science and of philosophy?—woman! But to go to the fountain-head of their offence—Who sends us into the world with headstrong passions, powerful senses, and an insatiable thirst for pleasure?—why, woman—woman—woman!

> Oh, woman! what distraction
> Was meant to mankind when thou wast made.
> Oh, angel! what a heaven thou canst form:
> Oh, devil! what an inviting hell invented.

Fred, I myself have been twice virtuous in my life; nay, don't laugh, tis true, really true, Fred, aye, and for half an hour together, and might have remained so, if it had not been for woman. The first time, I shall never forget it—scarce circumstances make deep impressions—it was one of the brightest mornings I ever beheld; a clear blue sky, without a cloud, was above my head; Loch Katrine, and its glassy waters, still and silent, with scarcely a ripple to disturb their tranquil surface, shone beneath my feet; huge mountains, covered with foliage, in all the variety of autumnal tint, red, green, and brown, mingled with the purple heath; or rocks projecting their rugged promontories over the lake, as though they were anxious to catch a sight of themselves in its liquid face, were around me; and the reflection of these rocks and foliage, seemed to form a natural frame to that mirror which Nature has so aptly placed to reflect some of her most beautiful scenery. And I stood alone amidst all the beauties by which I was surrounded; alone, upon a huge projecting mass of stone; and yet I was not alone, for a tiny insect was crawling with noiseless tread upon the same rock; and the total absence of all other living creatures, the stillness of the scene, gave a consequence even to the movements of this atom of animal life, which in another place, and under other circumstances, I should have crushed imperceptibly to myself, out of existence. But this rock was the insect's home; and I was but a stranger, and an intruder. A distant bell broke for a moment upon the stillness of the scene; and I saw various parties, clad in tartan, winding their way to their parish kirks: and I looked around me, at the fir-crowned hills, the blue sky, the calm and heaven-reflecting waters of the lake; and above all, at the bubbling streams that came tumbling and leaping and laughing over the rocks, gathering force and strength in their progress, fresh and bright and clear from their virgin source, and yet undefiled by all the purposes of human existence, which they were destined to fulfil ere they were lost in that ocean, which, like the eternity we hear and read of, swallows up everything: and I said to myself—for I was moral, Fred—Were I to worship, it should be in such a temple as that was—a temple of no human construction. Could any fretted vault equal that blue sky? Could the most elaborately-tessellated pavement compare with that bright lake? Could the most highly decorated walls vie with those heath-clad mountains; or the swell of

all the organs in Christendom compare with the music of that solemn stillness, with the harmony of that unbroken silence? The world and its pleasures seemed to diminish from my view; my thoughts seemed lifted above themselves; I felt a sensation I never had experienced before, and therefore set it down as virtue. Was it not so, Fred? Well; I was on the point of becoming virtuous for life, when the laughing blue eyes of Jeannette peeping over an adjoining precipice, and telling me that breakfast was ready, recalled me at once from heaven to earth. Oh, these women! you remember Jeannette; she was with me, you know, at Paris: well, she was a native of those mountains. It was there I first saw her; one of the innumerable and never-ending Stuarts, deriving her descent from a dozen kings. I still think I see her blue eyes and rosy lips, and hear that sweet voice just tinctured with her Scotch accent. If you remember she did not take kindly to Paris; and seemed to long after her native hills and her dear loch, yet we could never persuade her to return to them. They are capricious creatures. But you see, Fred, I owed my lapse from virtue entirely to Jeannette. Well, poor girl, there is not a prettier tombstone, or a more expressive epitaph in *Père La Chaise* than hers. I could not do less for her, considering all things, could I?

My other half-hour's attack of virtue was in the south of France, in a little valley, a kind of *cul-de-sac* of beauty, within a mile or two of Castres, and called the Sidobre. Finding myself in the neighbourhood, the description of Depping induced me to visit it; but he, like a common topographer, had only mentioned the cave of St. Dominic and the trembling rock as objects of curiosity. He omitted to say it was an epitome of the whole earth, with hill, dale, rock, lake, and stream, all contained within the compass of a couple of square miles. A sober matron of forty-five—forty-five is rather too old, Fred—sent one of her urchins, about three feet high, in a red jacket and with a huge pigtail, to be my guide to the stone pulpit, from which it is imagined the worthy saint used to preach conversion to the unenlightened Gauls, though his saintship was never within a couple of hundred miles of the place. However, the cave of St. Dominic, his pulpit, his preaching, and the trembling rock, were all banished from my remembrance at the scene which presented itself. Above me was a rude heap of rocks,

which seemed tumbled together by some convulsion of nature into a natural arch; and before me was a valley, in which were contained all the elements of all the scenery in the world. To the right and left were steep acclivities, diversified with barren rock and luxuriant foliage. Starting from clusters of green trees, were huge masses of the former, on the top of which human industry had created a garden or a corn-field; and here and there, a flourishing ash-tree seemed to have sprung from the heart of a stone. Beneath my feet bubbled a spring, whose waters gushed forth into the valley, forming by turns rapid streams and foaming cascades, serving the purposes of various mills; or gathering into quiet smooth lakes, on whose banks were seen the cottage and garden of the happy peasant. Here was an oak, there was a flower; here a rock, and there a corn-field. One spot was crowded with an assemblage of huge stones hanging in the air, so nicely poised, that they threatened to roll headlong into the valley; while beneath them smiled a peaceful cottage, a neatly-trimmed garden, and half-a-dozen rosy cherubs of children. In short, this valley presented such a variety of contrast, such a mixture of wildness and civilization, of fertility and barrenness, of rude rock and cultivated gardens: there was such a congregation in miniature of hill, dale, stream, and lake—trees thrusting their vigorous branches from between the fissures of the stones, and overtopping stones again bending down the vigorous branches of the trees—that the whole valley seemed like Nature's work-basket, into which, after creating the earth, she had thrown all her loose materials, and left them to form an organised chaos of themselves.

But it was not the scene itself, beautiful and peculiar as it was, that roused my sensation of virtue—it was the sight of the primitive inhabitants of the place—the peaceful families—the silver-haired patriarchs—the happy wives, the blooming children; from the venerable *aïeul* down to the *plus petits enfants* in their mothers' arms. The hand of infancy guiding the steps of tottering age; and alert manhood pointing out the path to inexperienced youth. There was every gradation of human age, and all of them happy and cheerful; and there was one venerable man with silver hairs hanging over, smiling upon, and fondling a beautiful child. It was a head of Rembrandt's looking at an infant of Sir

Joshua's; or the figure of Nestor by the side of Chantry's marble children at Litchfield.

> The child look'd up in the old man's face,
> Look'd up and laugh'd the while.
> Methought it was a beautiful thing to see
> The reflected light of its innocent glee,
> (Like the sunbeams on a wither'd tree,)
> In the old man's quiet smile.

I looked and felt as though I could have lived there for ever, and have bounded all my wishes within the compass of that beautiful valley. Ah! Fred, what different beings should we have turned out had our lot been cast there!

Well, I returned to my hostess of forty-five; and delighted her with my praises of her native village so much, that she opened to me all her little store of anecdote: rejoiced that there were no more proscriptions—that her sons were left to cultivate the land, instead of torn from their mother's arms to serve the projects of Napoleon's inordinate ambition. She rejoiced, too, that the restoration of the Bourbons had brought with it the restoration of convents, in which she could devote her daughters to the cloister, and thus ensure their future happiness. At this observation, I cast an inquiring eye at the face of a dark-eyed girl, who was looking over her mother's chair. Her look spoke any thing but accordance with the sentiment which had just been expressed. Her deep dark eye—her clear olive complexion—her raven hair—her rounded arm—her heaving bosom, just swelling into womanhood, and which seemed to heave the more for the quick glance which I had thrown upon her—all put my ideas of virtue to flight in a moment; while every incipient beauty seemed to cry out, "Quick, and redeem me from the horrors of the cloister." I have often blamed myself, Fred, for not having attended to this call upon my gallantry; and in some capricious moments have had an idea of going back, to see if any body had yet taken the trouble off my hands: for I shall never forget the velocity with which all my ideas of virtue were driven out of my head and heart, by the arch glance of those black eyes.

Thus you see, Fred, I owe the only lapses from virtue that I ever made, to woman—woman always led the way:

> Matre deâ monstrante viam.

And what could such poor weak mortals as you and I do, Fred, but follow—and so farewell.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE CLUB.

Ruin the husband, and the wife's virtue may be bid for.

Cards were at first for benefits design'd,
Sent to amuse, not to enslave the mind.
From good to bad how easy the transition!
For what was pleasure once, is now perdition.
PROLOGUE.

WITH these sentiments, and with a mind and heart that stopped at nothing that could tend to the accomplishment of any wish he had formed, it is not to be wondered at, that Leslie should do every thing he could to allure Trevor from his home; and, unfortunately for himself and Agnes, Trevor was addicted to many propensities which kept him abroad, and was easily led to the adoption of others, which were not naturally his own, by the "choice spirits," as he designated the set by whom he was surrounded.

Wine, cards, everything that produced a temporary excitement, by turns, occupied him; and in moments of reflection, the consciousness that he deserved reproaches from his wife, would make him imagine them in her looks, though she did not utter them; and this frequently kept him absent, as well as his dissipated habits.

Just at this period, too, his sister was compelled to visit a rich aunt in the country, whither Hartley had followed her; so that Trevor had lost the only real friends he possessed, and was deprived of those who pointed out to him his errors, and the manner in which he was trifling with his happiness.

In the mean time, Leslie was the constant attendant at Mrs. Trevor's parties, from the large route down to the select supper; and every interview increased his passion for her, and strengthened his determination, by some means or other, to make her his.

He felt that he was gaining ground in her esteem, and that she properly appreciated his talents; but further than this, his tact taught him he had as yet nothing to hope. He calculated, however, on her husband's neglect, on her youth and inexperience, and upon the romantic turn of her disposition, at some period or other operating in his favour, and he went on.

It was after one of the parties at Trevor House, when, either from a greater degree of excitement, or from his rapidly-increasing passion, Leslie had devoted himself even more than usual to its fair hostess, that he lingered the last of the gay assemblage, and still seemed unwilling to depart. She had been more than usually animated; and had never appeared so surpassingly lovely in the eyes of Leslie, as she had that evening.

He had spent hours with his eyes scarcely removed from the contemplation of her form and features; and his imagination had become so inflamed by the ardour of his wishes, that his passion was more than once on the point of bursting from his heart.

He had hung upon every accent that fell from her lips—he had watched every movement of her graceful form—he had contemplated her charms so intensely, that he was almost maddened by the idea of how very far he still was from the accomplishment of his object; and from the remembrance, that a being who had thus the power to engross his whole soul should belong to another.

With this idea, in addition to the other passions by which he was agitated, a deadly hatred to Trevor sprung up in his heart.

His imagination pictured this being as Trevor's fond and indulgent wife—gall and wormwood were sweetness in comparison with this idea; and he rejoiced that his arts had thus so far estranged him from his home, that he had seldom the mortification, or, as it was now become agony, of seeing them together.

Carriage after carriage was announced; party after party rolled away; yet Leslie could not bring his mind to the sepa-

ration. He seemed rivetted to the spot. He had never before felt how necessary the possession of Agnes seemed to his very existence. He had never before felt the powerful hold she had obtained over his imagination; and he inwardly swore that *nothing* should prevent the accomplishment of his end.

As he felt the fire of her soul-speaking glance which fell upon him, it seemed to light up an inextinguishable flame, which nothing but possession—full possession—could quench.

Once or twice he almost determined to wait till everybody was gone, declare his passion, call to her mind all the neglects and injuries she suffered from Trevor, and throw himself upon her mercy.

He had yet, however, sufficient presence of mind to perceive, that though she treated him kindly, she was not yet ripe for such a declaration as this. He felt that it was to hazard all; and ALL was too much for him to hazard. Yet, at the moment that he touched her hand, in his almost breathless adieu, and felt the effect of that momentary collision through all his veins, again did his impetuous heart rush to his throat—again did the words of passion rise to his lips. But he still had sufficient command over himself to refrain, though his eye spoke volumes of the master-passion of his soul.

He rushed down the staircase, and leaping into his cabriolet, applied the lash to his spirited horse, and felt a momentary relief in the daring dexterity with which he threaded the maze of carriages which still remained.

Who that has passed an evening with a beloved object, has not felt that vacuum of heart which occurs at parting! This is terrible, even where the love is mutual: how much more so must it be, when we madly love a woman who is in the possession of another, and the hour comes when we must not only quit this object, but leave her in the arms of one whom an illicit passion has made a rival!

This harrowing thought pressed upon the mind of Leslie. He hated Trevor for having possessed himself of Agnes; despised him for his neglect of such a woman; and laughed at the idea, that by estranging him from his wife, he was in part allaying the fever of his own feelings. Trevor was not yet at home. He might be at the club in time to prevent his returning till the morning; the idea that they might not meet

that night was a temporary alleviation to the tortures of his heart, and he dashed down to St. James's Street, his horse all foam; and his groom, fearless as he was in general, panting from fright at the hair-breadth turnings, and close approximations of the cabriolet to posts and carriages in its progress.

Leslie's quick eye caught a sight of Trevor, rushing down the steps of his club-house.

He started from the cabriolet. "Trevor, Trevor, my boy, whither so fast?"

"Home, or to the devil!" exclaimed Trevor: "though I think I am running away from the latter in quitting this d—d place, where the devil and all his imps seem to have taken up their lodgings in those cursed dice."

"What, man, hast lost a few guineas; and art grumbling with Fortune, by way of courting her favours?"

"A few guineas! Thousands would not pay my losses of these last two hours; and as to Fortune—changeable they may say she is, but to me she seems immutably the same slippery jade, and I could find in my heart to renounce her for ever," said Trevor.

"Tush, tush, man!—Is this Trevor? the gay Trevor—the envy and the example of us all? Nonsense: come back, try your luck again; and take my voucher, Leslie's voucher, that thou shalt prove this jade as capricious as the rest of her sex, whom both of us know never refuse their favours to those who persevere in their pursuit."

"Come, come;" and Leslie pressed his return.

"No, Leslie, no; I have already lost more to-night than I can conveniently pay;" said Trevor, despondingly.

"Pay—Trevor!"—and a thought flashed across the ever-plotting mind of Leslie. "Pay! And have you no friend—no Leslie, with an unencumbered estate, and a round sum at his banker's; and is it necessary for him to say that any sum he wants is at Trevor's command?" and he grasped his hand with all the apparent fervour of the sincerest friendship. Trevor hesitated: Leslie pursued the advantage—drew his arm within his, and they re-entered the club-house.

"Come, come, a thousand or two may redeem all that you have lost," said Leslie, "and give you your revenge upon the winners. Bring some Champagne—no, no, Burgundy, Burgundy. Come, man," in a half whisper, "don't let these fellows see that you are annoyed. They are cursed

impertinent prying fellows, with all their civility; and are the first to tell some scoundrel of an editor of the losses of men of spirit."

The Burgundy was brought; and bumper after bumper followed each other down the throat, and into the head of Trevor. Leslie wrote a draft for five thousand, which he forced upon his friend, taking a simple memorandum of the transaction, and then led him up stairs.

Below, there was mirth, and conversation, and laughter. Politics, scandal, all the topics of the day, were discussed over the little elegant suppers and superb wines which were served in this emporium of luxury. But, up stairs, all was silent. Nothing was heard, but the quick rattle of the dice on the box, before they rolled silently on the well-stuffed green cloth; the fall of the cards upon the tables; the passing of counters; and, now and then, to an attentive listener, the but half-suppressed execration of some infatuated wretch who tried in vain to turn fortune in his favour.

This, however, was but seldom the case. Every one here was too well-bred to give any other expression to feelings of this nature than that which was conveyed by an increasing paleness of the cheek, the knitting of the brow, or the stern compression of the lip, whose nervous irritation, however, too plainly bespoke the agitation of the heart within. But perhaps the most striking expression of this feeling is exhibited in the attempt to smile off the agony of a loss, when the lips refuse to obey the wish of their owner, and curl into an expression of bitterness instead of mirth, and, becoming pale, too plainly speak the pang experienced by the heart beneath. The Burgundy, the five thousand, the sight of the dice, the table, and the bank, recalled the inclination of Trevor to play; and he placed himself beside Leslie again to tempt his fortune.

Leslie, who was never a gambler, threw only for small stakes. His object was not gain; money was nothing to him but as it aided him in the principal pursuit of his life. He had, unfortunately for himself and others, plenty of it for this purpose; and perhaps the dread of diminishing such a powerful auxiliary, as much as any thing else, had deterred him from courting the excitement of the gaming-table.

As a man of pleasure and of observation, too, he had not failed to observe how little this pursuit tended to his ideas of enjoyment; and when he cast his eyes around the table

at which he was now seated, and observed the care-worn and anxious features of young and handsome men of his own age, he congratulated himself on the pursuit of objects which left no such traces on his own cheeks, whatever they might do on those of his victims.

The play had on this evening been more than usually deep, and the bank as usual very successful. Just at the moment, however, of Trevor's re-entrance, fortune had seemed inclined to change, and some large sums had just been won by the players. This, together with the Burgundy, and winning two or three stakes, encouraged Trevor to proceed with spirit, or, in other words, with desperation; for the spirit of a gambler is desperation.

Imagining fortune to have really changed in his favour, and unwilling to balk it; urged on, too, by Leslie; he placed a large stake on the table, and threw out. He doubled it on the next throw, and again lost. Thinking the bank again in favour with fortune, and the next thrower being notoriously unlucky, he again doubled his last stake; and, to make more certain, removed it to one of those portions of the table that were appropriated in favour of the bank. The money was scarce removed, before the unlucky thrower, for the first time in his life, threw in; and the last of Leslie's five thousand was swept away to increase the hoard of the presiding Plutus of the place.

Leslie, whose eye had watched every movement of Trevor with something of the avidity with which a spider contemplates a fly that has ventured into his web, had kept a mental account of his losses; and, going to a side-table, had written and changed another draft, the amount of which he slipped into Trevor's hand.

The players were now dispersing, excepting a few of the most desperate. Some of them sought in another bumper of champagne, or *ponche à la Romaine*, to drive away the agony of repentance at any rate till the morning. A few hours more of oblivion were cheaply purchased at the expense of their senses; and, alas! how many have awakened from this oblivion but to find ruin staring them in the face, and to seek a more permanent forgetfulness in poison or a pistol!

Trevor hesitated; but Leslie throwing a large stake on the table and winning it, he derived fresh courage; and at this moment, the dice being in the hands of the gentleman whom the bank had declared to be the last thrower for the night,

several desperate losers emptied their note cases on the table. Trevor, by a sudden impulse, almost convulsively grasped the whole of the notes just given him by Leslie, and, putting his hand on the table, seemed ready to place the whole at the hazard of the die. A momentary, and almost involuntary hesitation, appeared to cross his mind. Every eye was upon him: he saw that he was observed; and that fear of ridicule, which was his bane, came over him, and he dropped the whole upon the table.

From this moment his eye was involutarily fixed upon the thrower, with an intenseness of which he was insensible. This gentleman had a very trifling stake upon the table; and Trevor could have cursed him bitterly for the insensibility with which he gathered up the dice, and turned them once or twice between his finger and his thumb, before he put them into the box.

Large stakes were on the table; the last hopes of several players lay before them to be decided in an instant. The bank itself could not view the chances unmoved. All was silent; excepting the hard breathing of two or three who were on the point of being ruined, while they were yet too inexperienced to conceal their feelings. Trevor's heart beat audibly. Leslie, as he quietly and calmly contemplated the scene before him, *heard* it beat; and his intemperate thoughts wandered to the heart against which, at that very moment, it might have been beating with pleasure; and he smiled scornfully and hated him.

The gentleman who held the box, and who was a pale, elderly person, with a kind of sleepless eye that spoke the continuity of his nightly vigils, and whose few silvery hairs, and quiet placidity amidst the wreck of fortune, bespoke the experienced gambler, still played with the dice, as though in mockery of the intense anxiety by which he was surrounded. Trevor's lips almost moved to the curses which his heart dictated.

Then again would the delay create a hope; and a sudden feeling came over him, that if the thrower would call "*à sept*," he would win, almost forced him to prompt the call.

At length the box was held up. Every eye was intently fixed upon the thrower; every heart beat high with mingled fear and expectation: the impression was too intense to admit of such a quiet feeling as that of hope.

"*A cinq*," uttered the placid old gentleman; out rolled

the dice listlessly on the table. "*Onze*," cried the croupier: the bank swept in the heaps of money which by this throw had become their property; and Trevor had the double misery of knowing that his anticipation of "*à sept*" would have won, and the loss of his very large stake into the bargain. Of the amount of this last stake he was not aware, till the banker unfolded the notes before he gathered them up; and every one was astonished at the extent of the sum.

As his money was swept away, and he turned from the table, a sickness came over his heart that made him lean, for a moment, on Leslie for support; but he rallied instantly, and calling for pen and ink and more Burgundy, he gave Leslie his acknowledgment for the money he had lent him, and swallowed bumper after bumper so quickly, that his brain was soon insensible to the loss he had sustained, and to the anticipations of his repentance.

As their carriages were gone, Leslie desired one of the waiters to call a hackney-coach; into this he led Trevor, who convulsively grasped his hand at parting, calling him, in the little articulation which the wine had left him, his "*best friend*."

Leslie directed the coachman to the house of Trevor's opera-dancer in —— Street, saw him drive away, then casting his eyes up to the dark clouds which were rolling rapidly through the skies as though they were chased by the fast-coming morning, he laughed aloud, and strode away from the steps of this "temple of ruin," hugging himself with the idea that he had mounted another step of the ladder he was determined to ascend. Trevor would be in his power: perhaps a succession of such nights might—what might it not do? Thus thought Leslie: but then, it would not be to her mind, to her heart, to her inclination, that he owed her. Well, no matter; she will be *mine!* And in that idea every other was absorbed.

As he strode, rather than walked, down Piccadilly—for his passions, though in abeyance to the motives which had induced him so calmly to watch Trevor, were not allayed—his mental colloquy was interrupted by a herd of those poor, desolate, and houseless wretches, who way-lay the midnight-passengers in the neighbourhood of the clubs with clamorous mendicity, or with disgusting invitations.

Tired of their intrusion, and to get rid of their importunity,

Leslie scattered a handfull of silver on the pavement, which soon occupied the attention of the whole of the miserable crowd save one, who, as the gas-lamp gleamed on his countenance while in the act of throwing the money, fixed her eyes upon his face, and, quitting the hope of sharing the spoil with her companions, continued to follow him. She was evidently in a state of extreme intoxication, and her talk was a mixture of maudlin invitation and of dreadful imprecation. Two or three times he was compelled to shake her from his arm, and attempted, without stopping, to prevail upon her to desist; but as she still continued to persecute him, he turned upon her, and threatened that, unless she quitted him, he should be compelled to place her under the care of the watchman.

A frantic laugh was the only reply she made to this threat; a laugh that seemed to thrill to his very heart. He attempted to pass on, when she suddenly seized his arm, and, with a frightful energy, before he could summon nerve and strength enough to resist, she dragged him to a lamp-post, and placed him in such a position that the light gleamed full upon both their countenances.

She appeared to be of the lowest order of the lowest prostitutes. Her dress was covered with mud, and half torn from her shoulders in the struggles or quarrels of intoxication; a red handkerchief but half covered a breast which hung loosely over stays that seemed to be unfastened behind; she wore a dirty straw bonnet, decorated with a gaudy-coloured riband hanging at the back of her head, while a cap attempted in vain to confine a profusion of hair that hung dishevelled, matted, and tangled, over her naked shoulders and neck. Her eyes glared wildly, with a mixed expression of intoxication and passion; her cheeks were swelled and bloated, and tinged with a purple hue.

"Tell me," said she, in a voice which agitation rendered almost inaudible, "tell me, I say; answer me—"

"What?" said Leslie; "what want ye, woman?"

"I want a man—no, no, no; not a man—" her voice for a moment softened—"a villain! a damned villain! a—a—a—:" the struggle between her memory and intoxication seemed to impede the utterance of her thoughts. Leslie attempted to free himself from her; this roused her in a moment.

"Tell me," exclaimed she, "is not your name—" she

paused, seemed to be diving into her memory for something which had escaped her, and then suddenly thundered out—"Leslie? aye, that is it, Leslie! is not your name Leslie?"

Astonished, half alarmed by her frantic vehemence, thrown off his guard by the suddenness of such an unexpected appeal, Leslie, in the hurry of the moment, answered—"No."

She gazed at him for a moment, as if in doubt. Her energy seemed to have sobered her; and as the effects of intoxication passed away, the expression of recognition which had before so strongly characterized her inquiring glance, was no longer visible. She dropped his hand; and, with an imprecation, exclaiming, "I am mistaken," turned suddenly up one of the courts in the neighbourhood, and was out of sight in an instant.

Leslie himself could not account for the indefinable sensation which had made him, almost involuntarily, deny his name. The whole circumstance had been so sudden, so unexpected, that she was out of sight before he could sufficiently recall his own senses either to question or pursue her. Yet it was in vain that he attempted to banish the occurrence from his memory; he therefore turned home, to forget that and himself in the temporary oblivion of sleep.

## CHAPTER III.

### SLEEPING AND WAKING.

Quæ in vita usurpant homines, cogitant, curant, vident, quæque agun' vigilantes, agitantque, ea cuique in sumno accidunt.

CICERO.

To sleep—to dream—aye, there 's the rub!

SHAKSPEARE.

LESLIE's dreams this night were disturbed. He knew not why a circumstance that might have arisen from mere accident should make such a deep impression upon his mind—but so it was. Whether the excitement of the whole evening had rendered his heart and brain more sensitive than usual, and

that this occurrence had acted as a climax upon his excited feelings, he could not tell; but he passed a night of feverish dreaming. His eyes were scarcely closed, when woman appeared to him in all her native loveliness. First it was Agnes, with all the charms that had maddened his heart and brain. He saw her moving among her guests, the loveliest of them all—the "observed of all observers"—the admiration of his sex—the envy of her own; and yet insensible to anything but the idea of giving pleasure, and of meriting the admiration she excited. Then his loose imagination pictured her under other circumstances, as warmed into a corresponding passion to his own. Her eyes, as replying to the passionate glances with which his own dared to gaze upon her charms. Every look seemed to speak a yielding voluptuousness that made his heart ready to burst from his bosom with its beatings. Suddenly she became transformed; all her traits of beauty were turned into deformities; her mind was madness; and the beautiful Agnes Trevor, by gradual metamorphosis, seemed to become the wretched prostitute who had arrested his progress in the street.

He started from his sleep. Cold drops of perspiration stood upon his forehead; every limb was convulsed; and his firm nerves trembled. He quitted his bed; and sought in the action of his body some relief for his mind. But it was in vain that he altered his position—in vain he paced his apartment—in vain he seized on a book, in the hope of diverting his attention. For the first time he felt the inefficacy of his own resolution; and longed for the day as much as the murderer, who thinks himself haunted by his victim, and that nothing but the light of morning, "with its pale and ineffectual fires," can drive the spirit to the dark shades which it has quitted to torment him.

However innocent a life may be passed, there are few of us that have not experienced such a night as this: few of us that, in the darkness of solitude, have not trembled and wished that light which was to dissolve some distorted picture of the imagination, and again to usher us into activity and society.

In these dark hours of solitude, the memory paints the past, and anticipation illustrates the future, with colours peculiarly prominent. Colours that vanish as the light of day presents other objects to our contemplation, to divide our more serious thoughts with the various occurrences of life.

Leslie, who laughed at superstition, and at religion, which he called by that name, had never till this moment experienced such sensations as those which now agitated him, and a hundred times he cursed the folly which made him wait so impatiently for daylight. At length it came: rendering indeed "pale and ineffectual' all the gas with which his Square was illuminated. He threw up his sash to welcome the appearance, and the fresh morning air seemed to act as a soother to his brain He threw himself on a couch, and slept quietly till La Tour entered his room, who was surprised to find his master on the couch instead of the bed; but, like a prudent valet, he made no observation on so unusual a circumstance. Leslie was still in some state of excitement: his mind had not yet recovered its proper tone: he could not sit down coolly to his morning avocations of billet-doux, and other "trifles light as air," in which it was the pride of his philosophy to pass his life.

Agnes was gaining such a paramount interest in his heart, that for the first time he began to feel that love, which he had hitherto only dissembled or played with, would prove in verity the tyrant which poets have made him.

The announcement of Trevor, as the name accorded with every thought and with every feeling of his soul, gave a fillip to the state of mind in which he found himself. It was a name associated with the most sanguine wishes of his heart; and though the bearer of it, from being the possessor of the woman he adored, was hateful to him, yet he was welcome, as forming one of the stepping stones to the accomplishment of his wishes. In short, every thing connected with Agnes had a charm about it that was irresistible to his imagination.

Trevor's countenance was pale, and his step unsteady. His eye seemed to bend beneath the glance of Leslie: he felt himself a debtor for more than he could conveniently pay; and what man, placed for the first time in this situation, can face his creditor unabashed?

Trevor could perhaps have braved what he would have called a "rascally tradesman," and have bidden him with the utmost *nonchalance* go home without his money, or wait six months, though that tradesman might have had a starving family at home, dependent for their lives at that moment on the payment of Trevor's debt. But a debt of justice and a debt of honour are different—widely different in the eyes of a "gentleman and a man of honour:" and money borrowed

at the gaming table is considered just as much a debt of honour as money lost at it.

Trevor knew this: he knew, too, the punctilious accuracy of Leslie in all points in which his character as a man of fashion was concerned; and he came, vexed that his extravagancies prevented him from clearing himself at once from the cumbrance of this debt. Besides, there was nothing he was so much afraid of as that of sinking in Leslie's opinion; and forfeiting his pretensions to that character of a man of high fashion, which, with the weakness peculiar to the structure of his mind, he wished to preserve in his eyes.

Leslie, with his usual discrimination, saw all that was passing in the mind of Trevor in an instant; but determined not to relieve him, as he felt some indefinable pleasure in everything that tended to the abasement of Agnes Trevor's husband: the more unworthy he, the more probable the success of his schemes; and though, of course, he intended to assist him through the present difficulty, by becoming his sole creditor, he had laid a plan by which the whole of the transaction should be related to Agnes in the most favourable point of view for himself.

After the first salutations, a few curses at the wine, and at the club, Trevor asked Leslie if he knew how much he had lent him.

"Oh, no!" said Leslie; "I keep no accounts myself of such trifles: there are your acknowledgments, and my banker's drafts will tell if they are correct; for you know I never change a draft for myself at the cursed place."

The hastily and drunkenly-scrawled acknowledgments were produced, and on being examined, were found to amount to several thousands more than Trevor had anticipated.

Unlike Leslie, the moment he was set down at his *petite ménage* in Curzon Street, he went to bed, and slept soundly till the morning. But when he did wake, and all the overwhelming, yet indistinct recollections of the night came upon his mind, he could have cursed the daylight, which had been so heartily welcomed by Leslie. Knowing that he had lost largely, yet uncertain as to the amount, he blinded his own recollection of the circumstances, and endeavoured to hope that he was mistaken; or when certain sums forced themselves into his memory, he was willing still to hope that at any rate he had forgotten none, and that there were no more to come against him than those he so tenaciously remembered.

It was unwillingly that his eyes and mind acknowledged that it was day ; he turned his aching head on the pillow, but the softness of the down could not again entice him into oblivion ; his mind and memory were awake, and there was no more sleep for the still weary eyes. Nothing props the eyelid open so forcibly as the recollection of a nightly debauch or folly, when it comes upon a mind not entirely callous to the consequences.

The blandishments of his mistress were disgusting to him ; they filled his mind and head with repentance of another nature ; and he turned from her with that sickening sensation, which none have known but those who have sacrificed the best feelings of their hearts, the most sacred pleasures of their natures, at the shrine of purchased beauty.

He made his toilet with the coward slowness of a man unwilling to find himself in a state fit for the business he has to encounter. He determined to walk to Audley Square, that a few minutes more delay might occur, than could possibly be the case in his carriage before his interview with Leslie, whom he dreaded to meet under such circumstances, only because he had not the money at hand to show that he could carry off a loss, even of such magnitude, with all the *nonchalance* of a man of pleasure and of fashion.

Like most others, Trevor's memory had furnished him with scarcely half the amount which his rashness had lost, which was indeed much more considerable than his worst anticipations could have imagined, had he allowed himself to anticipate ; and Leslie found upon summing them all up together, that the acknowledgments had put Trevor more into his power, than he himself had supposed. Leslie had made himself acquainted with Trevor's resources ; and though they were large, taking his wife's fortune into consideration, yet they were limited, and so settled, that there were no means of increasing them. Leslie likewise knew that he had already anticipated large sums on the rents of the two coming years, and that he had begun to feel the wants of a rich man who needs money, more galling, perhaps, than those of the poor man in the same predicament.

The poor man is used to truckle to the pride of a lender ; his mind is hardened to the exhibition of the state of his comparative poverty, and he becomes accustomed to the tone of supplication, either for a fresh loan, or for longer time to pay the last. But the rich man, used to command, accus-

'omed to expenses without control. to whom the obtaining money has hitherto given no more trouble than to say to his stewart, "I must have it," and he finds it; to have to borrow is painful in the extreme; and then those men from whom it is generally borrowed, creatures with minds and hearts more sordid than the ore they traffic in, love to find an opportunity of lording it over those whom they hate because they are their superiors.

How often has one blushed to know, that before those usurious scoundrels, who live upon the vitals of the heir—who exist upon the ruin of the wealthy and the improvident—the representatives of the first and most honourable houses in the country, have condescended to truckle for that temporary relief, which, while it protracts, only renders ruin more certain and more irremediable.

As Trevor walked slowly to Audley Square, he resolved on an application to one of those persons among his resources for raising the money: for his steward had given him a hint that no more rents could be anticipated. Indeed, the times had rendered a great many farms tenantless; or rather, the landlord in his renewals, not having changed with the times, had rendered their occupation impossible, with any hope of profit by the terms which were demanded.

Trevor had been so careless, that money matters had never troubled him; and now that pecuniary difficulty for the first time stared him in the face, instead of looking at the evil with an eye to prevent its recurrence, his mind only revolted schemes which were the most likely to relieve a present difficulty with the least trouble, without any regard to the future. During these lucubrations he had gone a very roundabout way from Curzon Street to Audley Square. In the first instance, he had strolled up Park Lane, saying that the air would refresh him. Finding himself in Hyde Park, the barracks attracted his attention, and he wanted to see one or two of the officers, and to know who was on guard, that he might tell Leslie—Leslie would like to know. In returning he had never admired the beautiful new gates so much, or looked at them so long; this led to another contemplation of the lodges; at length, however, he found himself in Stanhope Street, strode boldly into the Square, and thundering at Leslie's door, was shown to him in his library in a minute.

After the acknowledgments had been produced, and the amount ascertained, Trevor confessed his inability to dis

charge them without having recourse to means which would add greatly to his losses, and indeed even those means were not immediately available, as the "laws delay, and the insolence of office," were to be conquered before the cash coul be forthcoming.

Leslie had gratified that dislike of feeling to Trevor which his passion for his wife had been gradually creating, by thus reducing him to ask a pecuniary favour. He had now another game to play, and that was the generous one, that should attach Trevor to him by the ties of gratitude as strongly as he was now attached by those of admiration.

"Why, my dear Trevor, what the devil ails you?" said he; "you look as forlorn and wo-begone, and as frightened at me as if I were some unfortunate dun, who had been knocking single knocks at the brass lion at your door for the past six months, and had been let in at last through the stupidity of your porter. What are a few thousands among friends?—There—there go the acknowledgments into my desk—call for them when you please—I have literally more money than I know what to do with; and my only plague is, that my steward and my lawyer are perpetually urging me to put it out to interest—and now I will take their advice, my dear Trevor," assuming an air of cordial friendship. "I will put it out to the best of all interest, and shall consider myself as usuriously paid if my money enables me to prove my friendship for you."

Trevor would have thanked him; but Leslie stopped him with—"nonsense, man! what is the utility of money to such prudent thrifty creatures as I am, if it were not that it enables us to supply the occasional wants of generous spirited fellows like yourself?"

There was a little satire in this remark that grated upon Trevor's ears; but this feeling immediately subsided, when Leslie continued; "But, Trevor, I am afraid you don't recollect that I was not your only creditor last night. That devil ——— told me that the three last throws before my arrival at his cursed place were scored to your account. I must not leave you in his hands. So there, there 's another draft—clear that score immediately; for I would not leave the character of my worst enemy in that fellow's hands for an hour for the universe. Pay him, and the devil will swear you are a god; but owe the rascal a guinea, and though you may have raised him from a dung-hill to a palace, there is not an epithet in the whole vocabulary of abuse that he will not lavish upon you.—So now,

my dear fellow, *au revoir*, for I have schemes :—schemes, my boy—that you know nothing of.—So away till the evening brings the hour of carelessness and champagne."

Trevor took his leave, lightened in heart, and impressed with more than admiration of the character which, like an *ignis fatuus*, was leading him to ruin: little thinking the schemes he had left him to meditate were against his own honour and the virtue of his wife

Another step, thought Leslie, and began to toilettise, that he might be in readiness to meet Agnes in every street through which she drove. He really began to feel existence only in her presence, and he sought it every where.

It was the business of his life to ascertain all her engagements, and to follow or meet her throughout them all; he was generally in the way to hand her from her carriage wherever she stopped—he was sure to be at Andrews's, ready to point out the last new publications. He was at the side of her carriage in the Park, and the evening of course threw them together, from the circumstance of their moving in the same circle of society.

Strolling with the intent of watching her carriage in the line leading from Pall Mall to the top of Bond Street, that great exchange of fashion, where one is sure to meet every body that is worth meeting, he was joined by one or two of the officers on guard, and by a young life-guardsman; and while they were discussing the high play of the overnight, and comparing notes as to winnings and losings, the life-guardsman suddenly exclaimed, "By G— here comes Slashing Nan; now, if she is primed with what she calls a flash of lightning, a pretty batch of oaths will she let fly at us."

Leslie's eye turned in the direction pointed out by the speaker, and to his almost horror, saw the same woman who had addressed him under such curious circumstances the previous night, and who had left such a painful impression upon his mind.

She was no longer, however, the furious being she had then appeared; she no longer strode along with rapid strides, but moved slowly and sullenly. Her dress had been temporarily repaired, but still retained the dirt of the mud in which she had been rolled overnight. Her bonnet was slouched down over the face. Her gown was tied up almost as high as the armpits, with a red sash, and the looseness of her waist proclaimed that there was no confinement of stays; one foot was

slipshod, showing the heel of a very dirty stocking, and part of a petticoat quite as dirty peeped from under her gown; a Belcher handkerchief was tied round her throat, and an apology for a pair of gloves was upon her hands.

She approached the party; but looked neither to the right nor to the left.

"No," exclaimed the person who had pointed her out, "she is in the sullens—the flash is out of her—poor Nan is not up yet."

As she approached, Leslie half trembled; he dreaded her attacking him again the moment she came near enough to see his face; and though her knowing his name must have been merely accidental, yet in his epicurean system he had steered so clear of contact with anything like the contamination of prostitution, that he dreaded laying himself open even to the suspicions that he could be known to such a creature as that before him.

There was likewise in the presence of this unfortunate and degraded creature a feeling created in his mind approaching to dread, for which he could not account, and which was indeed utterly inexplicable to himself.

He was glad therefore to see that she passed them without any signs of recognition, and strolled on, perfectly unconscious of their persons, or of their observations on her.

When he no longer dreaded her recognition of him, Leslie carelessly asked his companion what he knew of her.

"Faith," replied the guardsman, "all I know is, that our men call her the 'slasher,' and that sometimes, when the blue-ruin has done its work, we have had her into the barracks to give a few of us lessons in slang. The curious thing about her is, that, till she is drunk, she is dull and sullen as you see her now, and is never, they say, heard to swear; but the moment the liquor mounts to her brain, she seems inspired, and utters rhapsodies, mingled with wit, obscenity, and blasphemy, that, at the moment they proclaim what a she-devil she is, show plainly enough that she must have had a very superior education. By G— it was but last night she puzzled the chaplain at his own weapons, and made him knock under."

Strange, thought Leslie, that men bearing the title and holding the stations of gentlemen should admit even of the momentary society of such a creature as this! and little think those delicate creatures, those finished pieces of Na-

ture's workmanship, that adorn society, that the hand which leads them through a quadrille, and the lips that whisper soft nonsense in their ears, have been within a few short hours prostituted to such purposes as these, and in contact with the most degraded creatures of vice and profligacy!

How few women know what men really are!

Still perplexed at her knowing his name, he determined to speak to her. He accordingly *au revoir'd* his companions, and forgetting even Agnes for a moment, followed in the same direction, keeping the object of his curiosity in sight.

As she went through the palace, and passed the sentinels and several other soldiers, she was greeted with some slang recognition from each; of these salutations, however, she took no notice, but walked on with an appearance of utter insensibility.

Leslie passed her, and looked full into her face, but she betrayed no sign of recognition—all was perfect apathy. At length, arriving at a solitary part of the park, he suddenly turned and stopped her.

She gazed on his face unconsciously.

"My good woman," said Leshe, "do you know me? nay, nay, don't turn your eyes away, but look at me steadily, and tell me if you know me."

The creature seemed called to a slight degree of consciousness; her vacant blue and glazed eye fell upon his features, then seemed to peruse his person, as though the question had been understood; but it soon resumed its unconscious expression, as shaking her head, she said, slowly, and as though she had hardly the power of utterance, "No, no; how should I know you?"

"Did you ever see me before?" continued Leslie.

Again the same unconscious stare, and a shake of the head, indicated a negative.

During the period of this short colloquy, Leslie attempted to trace in her swollen and livid features something to guide him in the solution of the mystery; but the glassy eye—the sunken cheek, except when swollen by violence or intemperance—the livid brow—the streaks of carmine which still remained, rendering the death-like white of the other part of her face still more appalling and conspicuous, gave him no clue to the problem: all appeared utterly unknown. There seemed not to be a single recollection in his mind connected

with the features before him, bloated and disfigured as they were by intemperance.

He again bade her look upon him, and asked if she knew his name; but still received a negative. Her look, however, this time betrayed impatience, and that nervous irritability which was annoyed by a cessation from action.

He gave her some loose silver, and quitted her; convinced in his mind, from this proof, that her utterance of his name on the preceding evening must have been the result of mere accident.

As for the woman, she received the money with an insensibility that seemed to betray almost an ignorance of its use; and without even any expression of thanks, pursued her way in silence. This short colloquy had greatly relieved Leslie; and he laughed at the interest which he had suffered such a circumstance to create in his mind, and called himself a fool for the uneasiness which he had permitted it to give him during the preceding night.

He banished the whole affair therefore from his mind; and gave himself up entirely to his passion for Agnes, and to the schemes he was projecting for the accomplishment of his wishes.

La Tour was made acquainted with the whole of the transactions of the last night, as well as with the arrangements between his master and Trevor in the morning: this information, with certain little addenda furnished by the prolific imagination of the Frenchman, was immediately conveyed to Flounce, whose indignation against her master, which was continually kept alive by La Tour, would immediately induce her to carry the story to her lady.

Flounce had lived with Agnes from a child, and had therefore many more privileges than a common *femme-de-chambre;* but Agnes was very peremptory in stopping her, when, in these fits of indignation against Trevor and of admiration of Leslie, she would trespass upon these privileges, by inveighing against the one and praising the other.

In spite, however, of these interdictions, and of her lady's anger, Flounce contrived always to say enough to leave a general impression on the mind of her lady of the imprudence of her husband, and of the generosity of his friend; and these impressions were not without their effect upon a mind keenly alive to everything that resembled nobleness of conduct, as well as to everything that tended to the abasement

of the human mind. Those which were received in favour of Leslie, were likewise greatly increased by the generous manner in which he always appeared to excuse the aberrations of Trevor; and by his never mentioning or alluding, in the slightest degree, to his own share in any of the transactions in which he was apparently so honourably implicated.

All these circumstances induced a dangerous confidence on her part; her former dread and contempt of his character was rapidly changing into admiration at the discovery of such unexpected qualities; her distrust was fast vanishing; and she felt esteem and friendship growing in its place.

Leslie marked this, and rejoiced: he saw that although no direct way was open to the accomplishment of his wishes—to the gaining of her love; yet by these indirect means, he might gradually attain his ends. Like Satan, he determined—

> ——————With tract oblique
> At first, as one who sought access, but feared
> To interrupt, sidelong he works his way.
> As when a ship, by skilful steerman wrought
> Nigh river's mouth or foreland, where the wind
> Veers oft, as oft so steers, and shifts her sail;
> So varied he.———

## CHAPTER IV.

### ANTICIPATION.

> What should I marry for? Do I want any thing?
> Am I an inch the farther from my pleasure?
> Why should I be at charge to keep a wife of my own,
> When honest married men will ease me,
> And thank me too, and be beholding to me?
> BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

### LESLIE TO VILLARS.

FRED, my dear Fred, congratulate me. I have spent the whole morning with her, and am to go to the Opera with her—to the Opera. And is this all, methinks, I hear you say? Is it the gallant, the successful Leslie, that makes this

a subject of congratulation? After months of attendance, after the millions of sighs, and all the et-cetera of an ardent pursuit—is it come to this, that Leslie, the irresistible Leslie, thinks it matter of congratulation that he is to go to the Opera with a woman whom he has pursued for months? and yet so it is. I, who have been in the habit of posting over the highway to success in these matters *au grand galop*, dashing aside every obstacle, and plunging through all the mud and mire, am now obliged to proceed *à petit pas*: every rut in the road seeming an unfathomable and impassable chasm, and every mole-hill erecting itself into an inaccessible mountain. The greater however the obstacles, the greater my determination to proceed; aye, and to succeed.

Oh! these women—these women—

Framed in the prodigality of nature—

they are the veritable destroyers of mankind; armed with irresistible temptations, they lead us on, and on, and on, till there is no possibility of receding, and yet they say *we* seduce *them*. What injustice there is in this world of ours!—is n't there, Fred? It is their own charms that are the true seducers; they seduce us, and we return the compliment:—is n't that logic? I am very glad that logic formed part of my education at Oxford; for it saves a vast deal of useless repentance, of a great quantity of misinterpretation.

But to return to the Opera. To go *tête-à-tête* with a woman to her box, is always a step gained. It admits you to a kind of domesticity, which can never be had any where but in an Opera-box, or a boudoir, or—somewhere else: and you know, Fred, the delicious public privacy of a box at our Opera; a place where one may say any thing, aye, and do any thing, if people permit it. Eh, Villars?

Oh! Fred, Fred! with what a thousand recollections is that Opera House associated! Do you think the groves of Arcadia ever witnessed so many vows as the painted canvass of that theatre? Do you think that the notes of the far-famed nightingale ever warbled over so many lovers as those of the Italian cantatrices have done from Mara down to Pasta? or, dost think that any bower in the world, decorated with seats of sweet-brier and roses (devilish uncomfortable

seats, by the bye, unless the thorns are extracted), and surrounded by myrtle and eglantine, ever witnessed so many yielding hearts and lovers' vows (both of them sometimes broken), and other things appertaining thereto, as the lawyers say, as those boxes have, with their red silk curtains, calico linings, *chaises-longues*, and cane-bottomed chairs? Depend upon it, Fred, in spite of romance and poetry, that the Opera-box carries it all to nothing. By the bye, Fred, never while you live have a looking-glass in your Opera-box —I'll tell you why some other time.

Your poets may talk of Arcadian bowers, and beds of roses, and solitary groves, and nightingales; and may trumpet forth all the paraphernalia of a common-place pastoral; but give me an Opera-box to make love in. The hundreds of similes and ideas which the stage affords in illustration of the passions—the excitement of the scene—the opportunities for flattery by a comparison with others; and a little detraction of a neighbour or a rival, always gets one on with the sex—makes an Opera-box the most delightful temple that was ever dedicated to the mysteries of Cupid. The delicious music softens the heart; then the display in the dancing captivates the senses of the dear little souls, and leads them to think, and wonder—and—I don't know what besides.—Do you, Fred? No; there is no heart so *usé*, even among us, that is insensible to this excitement; excepting, indeed, our old friend the Marchioness, who has tried it for half a century.

Don't you remember Mrs. D. F—— always said she should never have been guilty of her imprudence with H——, —Imprudence! I love a woman's definition—don't you? It beats Johnson—does n't it?—if her husband had never permitted her to have an Opera-box; and this was so strongly impressed upon her mind, that her lover had actually formed the idea of pleading this dangerous indulgence of her husband in mitigation of damages; and would actually have done so, but that his counsel advised that in such case the proprietors of the Opera might have a fair ground of action against him, from the mischief the *exposé* might do the theatre. And yet Trevor himself proposed my accompanying his wife; therefore, whatever happens must be attributable to him—must n't it? Imagine me, therefore, domesticated in her box the whole evening, *bien niché*, as the French have it, behind the curtain; but though *niché*, any thing but a

statue. And were I a statue, it would in her presence only be to realize a story, like that of Pygmalion; and Agnes would be the goddess of beauty, to infuse into me the life and fire and pleasure of existence.

Is n't it strange, Fred, that I, who know the sex so well who have studied its weakness only to increase my own strength, and its strength only to reduce it to weakness, should, during such an age of close attendance, have made so little impression? Yet, so it is. As yet there is nothing but an incipient friendship; a kind of very Platonic sympathy, that has not even amounted to a spark, which one might hope to bellows into a future flame. But Platonic love does not answer our purpose.—Does it, Fred? 'Tis nonsense talking about all mind, all soul, and all that. The body must have something to do with it. As to your Platonics—

> So angels love—so let them love for me:
> When I'm all *soul*—so shall my love too be.

My only hope arises from her increasing indifference to the palpable neglect and notorious infidelities of Trevor, and from her increasing confidence in your humble servant. But whence arises this confidence? say you. Why, because I apparently do every thing to lead the misled Trevor back to his duty; and because she reads in my averted eye a sympathy for a neglected wife, without discovering the passion —the burning passion which glows beneath it—and which would leap out in my glances, if it dared, with all the fire and impetuosity of a volcano. But it is not time yet for the eruption.

Another point, too, I have gained: she thinks me ill-used by the world—imagines me libelled by what it says of me, gives me credit for the disdain with which I treat its accusations, and attributes my philosophy under all with which it assails me, to a consciousness of its being undeserved. She imagines me more sinned against than sinning.

These are her ideas, Fred; and her heart, like a knight-errant, has risen in my defence. She imagines me calumniated, and becomes my protector. She says she will judge for herself, by what she herself can see, (heaven bless her, and let her see a great deal more than she yet dreams of!) and never be led by common report, as she determines to think that—

> Busy opinion is an idle fool,
> That as a school-rod keeps a child in awe,
> And frights the unexperienced temple of the mind.

And you may be assured that I agree with her. To excite her generosity thus, is a great point gained with one of her sex, for heaven knows how far she may carry it.

With regard to the one great affair, which is, alas! too much emblazoned in the heraldic records of gallantry to attempt concealment, we have touched on it but once, and I managed it in so masterly a manner, that she is quite uncertain whether I tempted the lady, or the lady tempted me, and has found an apology for the whole adventure in the inexperience of a boy, and in the ardent temperament of youth. Oh! Fred, Fred! whenever a woman can thus find an apology for one seduction in the natural steps which lead to *all* seductions, I am afraid her own is not entirely out of the cards. What think you? This "I calculate," as the Americans say, is another step. By-the-bye, I never tried an American. I wonder what sort of stuff the transatlantic maids, widows, and wives, are composed of. What think you, Fred, of a trip to New-York, or Pennsylvania, or Boston, or some other of their barbarous cities, upon a voyage of discovery in these matters of natural history? matters a little more interesting to mankind than the icebergs, red snow, rein-deer, and Esquimaux, which decorate the pages of our North Pole voyagers. I dare say the arrival of two such fellows as we are among the Yankees would create about such a devil of a fuss among the women there, as the presence of Apollo did with the daughters of old *Mysis* in the burletta of Midas. I much question, though, whether we should not do more mischief among these "calculating" people by being sent out as a bale of goods, with a valuation and invoice tacked to our tails; for I dare say love is no marketable commodity there, unless it could be sold by weight.

Yet I suppose women are much the same all over the world, the very reverse of their own mirrors, which reflect without talking, while they talk without reflecting: and I dare swear that this is the case, from the gazelle-eyed Persian, who gazes at the liquid portrait of her eastern loveliness in the clear waters of the Bendemir, to the Esquimaux

damsel who dresses her frozen locks by the reflection of an iceberg. But where the devil is my pen wandering?

> ——————————what does it in the north
> When it should be serving its sov'reign in the south?

And yet it can't serve me much here, with a mistress not yet drawn into a correspondence. Would you believe that any woman whom he chose to be in love with, would know Leslie for six months, and not know his handwriting? Yet, by my faith, Fred, it is a fact, a melancholy fact; and I hate melancholy facts.

Ah, Villars, a correspondence is the thing after all. Things look so pretty upon paper, and one's sentences are so well turned; and then one's letters get tucked into tuckers, and put behind pillows, and furnish so much food for sentiment; and then come Pope's lines to the dear creatures' recollections of the divine origin of letters:

> Heaven first sent letters for some wretch's aid,
> Some banished lover, or some captive maid.

Heaven is certainly very useful as an illustration. And yet, now I think of it, she does know my handwriting; that is, if the sight of it made such an impression on her, as her dear little crow-quill scrawl did upon me, when I lighted on some verses which she had copied out, and which I treasure up—and read—and read—till I imagine all the glowing sentiments they contain are addressed to myself; and go distracted when I awake from my day-dream, and recollect they are Byron's.

These poets are certainly very useful to lovers with a certain set of women. Another of my schemes is to impress her with an idea, that in spite of all my—pshaw!—I will not be vain, but that I am the sufferer under the influence of a hopeless passion. This excites her curiosity; begets an interest in my fate, and creates pity; and you know the hacknied proverb, but not the less true because hacknied, particularly when the pity is at all connected with any ideas of the tender passion. By-the-by, I wonder who the devil nicknamed one of the most violent passions of human nature, at least of yours and my human nature, the *tender* passion!

Well, I have so contrived my sighs and looks, and "every

action of my passing life;" and La Tour has so well thrown in his hints to her waiting-maid, that she is fully impressed with this notion; and I often catch her watching me as I address different women, or rather indifferent women, with the view to discover my secret.

The other day, with this view, I pressed Buffon into my service. Methinks I hear you say, Why, what the devil can the biographer and historian of quadrupeds have in common with such a woman as your pen and passion describe this to be? Listen: we were all at Mrs. Bluemantle's; you remember the old lady—a collector of scraps of poetry, a sewer-together of epigrams and conundrums, and who sets up for a learned lady upon the strength of keeping an album, bound in purple morocco, and filled with the namby-pamby nonsense of half a hundred amateur poets, or rather, prosers.

Well, we were all to write a sentence, or a verse, either extempore or from memory, in this album of Mrs. Bluemantle's. This scheme in my head, with a lynx-eye I watch every opportunity of throwing in a hint of unrequited passion and of disappointed love. There 's nothing softens a woman's heart like it, Fred, depend upon it.

I had been reading Buffon, and my good genius popped this sentence of the naturalist into my head, just in the nick of time; from whence it was transferred to the hot-pressed, gilt-edged page of the album as naturally as possible:—

"Amour! Désir inné! Ame de la nature! Source féconde de tout plaisir, de toute volupté, pourquoi fais-tu l'état heureux de tous les êtres, et le malheur de l'homme?"

Was not that well thrown in, Fred? Had you seen her eye as it glanced over the lines, you would have said so.

I saw it acted like a hand-grenade, which, though it did not quite fire the train, was very near it.

I did not say a word about the context to her, or the reply which Buffon makes to his own question; but I send it you lest you should give the old naturalist credit for a refinement which he does not deserve. You know justice is my *forte*, and I like to do it to every body: to men, as well as women:—

"C'est qu'il n'y a que la physique de cette passion qui soit bon, c'est que malgré ce que peuvent dire les gens épris, le moral n'en vaut rien. Les animaux, guidés par le sentiment seul, (*sentiment* means instinct in French, Fred; not sentiment) leurs désirs sont toujours proportionnés à la puissance de jouir (sensible dogs, Fred); ils sentent autant qu'ils

jouissent (lucky dogs); et ils ne jouissent qu'autant qu'ils sentent. (Did you ever hear of such wise dogs, Fred?) L'homme, au contraire, en voulant inventer des plaisirs n'a fait que gâter la nature. (Very true, Fred.) Tout ce qu'il y a de bon dans l'amour appartient donc aux animaux, tout aussi bon qu'à nous."—And so much for the love of the Buffola Buffon. But you know I could not write all this in Mrs. Bluemantle's album. She might not have thought it proper; and, as D'Oyley says, if there is any thing in the world I do understand, it is propriety.

Assume a virtue, if you have it not—

is one of the best lessons that was ever given to poor human nature: for hypocrisy is the order of the day; and, take us altogether, Fred, I do not think there are two honester fellows in the world, in this sense of the word, than our two selves. Is not this your opinion?

La Tour has just been to say that dressing-time is at hand. Fool! does he imagine that I have done any thing else than watch the progress of time since I last parted from her? By my soul, every tick of my watch has been a comfort to my heart, as it brought me a second nearer to the time appointed for my seeing her again.

We dine a very small party in the little drawing-room in Park Lane. Trevor, Agnes, and myself, proceed to the Haymarket early, that she may hear the whole of the opera, and indulge her enthusiasm for Mozart. How a little enthusiasm for music helps us on with them!

Trevor has a new flame, with a box *aux troisoièmes*, who comes early likewise. He has confided his secret to me, and I have, most *unwillingly*, promised to find an excuse for his early absence from his wife's box. So now to dress, then to dine, and then to the opera, the dear delicious opera—that great mart of every thing that is delightful in the world; the royal exchange for sighs, smiles, glances, *billets-doux*, and visiting tickets; the scene of so many commencements, and what is better, of so many *dénouements* of intrigues; the resort and delight of all, from the grim old dowager who graced the circle of Queen Charlotte, to the languishing young lady of the last drawing-room; from the connoisseur of music, to the amateur of "every thing:" aye, every thing, Fred, as you know full well; for of all the men

I ever knew, Fred, you are really one of the worst. Ask your own conscience, now, and tell me fairly how many oaths have you sworn and broken in these very opera-boxes! But, with you, I am afraid that

> Your oaths and your affections are all one
> With your apparel; things to put off and on.

Why don't you take example by me, Fred? Let me advise you to do so before it is too late. But I am going to my Agnes, and I have no time, no head, no heart for teaching; and, therefore, you shall escape this time. I am so full of my anticipations, that I could say with Romeo—

> My thoughts presage some joyful news at hand:
> My bosom's lord sits lightly on its throne;
> And, all this day, an unaccustom'd spirit
> Lifts me above the ground with cheerful thoughts.
> Ah me! how sweet is love itself possess'd,
> When but love's shadows are so rich in joy!

And so good bye, Fred, till after the opera.

## CHAPTER V.

### A DINNER.

The feast of reason and the flow of soul!

The little drawing-room dinners at Trevor House were among the most exquisite entertainments of that hospitable mansion. Ostentation and formality were banished from the board; yet there was every thing that could give a zest to the epicurean manner in which the table was served. The room itself was of very moderate dimensions, and opened, by one Venetian window, into a spacious balcony overlooking the Park. This balcony, at all seasons of the year, was filled with flowers and odoriferous plants, whose delicious perfume pervaded the whole apartment. The sides of the room were

pannelled in rich fluted silk of India manufacture; the styles of the pannels were of white and gold; the ceiling richly ornamented in the same manner; and in the centre of every pannel was an exquisite cabinet picture of some celebrated master. The angles of the room were rounded and formed into four niches; three of which were adorned by productions of the chisels of Canova, Thorwaldson, and Chantry, and the fourth filled by a beautiful cast from the antique. Ottomans of the same silk as the hangings of the room, surrounded the whole apartment and filled the recesses; a thick crimson carpet covered the floor; and the doors were formed into pannels of the room, so that, when they were shut, the entrances were concealed, and there appeared no other opening than that into the balcony, which, from being enclosed with *jalousies* and glass, formed a complete conservatory attached to the apartment.

A round table occupied the centre of the room, calculated for six or eight persons; this being the greatest number that Mrs. Trevor ever permitted at her little drawing-room coteries, to which, engagements of a much more ostentatious character frequently gave place. These little parties were generally made up in a hurry, and were by Agnes denominated her *extempore* dinners and suppers. On these occasions four pedestals, containing compartments, and moving upon centres, were placed at the four corners, within reach of the guests; these contained every thing that could possibly be wanted, so that the use of servants was entirely precluded, excepting for the removes, when they were summoned by a bell communicating from the under side of the table.

It was in the society that frequently surrounded this table, and in the coteries which she assembled in this her favourite apartment, that Agnes enjoyed more pleasure than in any of the large and magnificent parties which she was compelled so frequently to give in her own house, and so frequently to attend at the mansions of others. It was in these parties that rank gave no title to admission. Friendship, liking, talent, were the inducements for the invitation of the party; and it was here that the poor poet, the humble artist, the aspiring dramatist, and not unfrequently the meritorious actor, were encouraged, without being required to exhibit those talents with which they were struggling to create for themselves names in the world. They were here unchecked by the superiority of those by whom they were surrounded, and fearless of that insolent foppery with which it is so frequently the pride of

aristocratic ignorance to frown down the talent which they envy, but which they cannot appreciate.

The good, however, of these parties did not finish merely in the pleasure of their enjoyment. The works of many an industrious artist had been brought forward by the patronage which Agnes contrived to procure for them at these coteries; and talent of different descriptions, that had been recommended to her as deserving of notice, had crept from poverty and obscurity into fame and independence, by the helping hand of her whom their possessors looked upon as their tutelar genius. That the talents her kindness had thus fostered into public existence should sometimes, with serpent tongue, turn and sting the hand that had drawn them from their native obscurity, might for a moment grieve her; but she never swerved from her determination to pursue the same means of assisting others.

It was in these parties that new poems and plays were criticised; new works of art illustrated; and disquisitions of every sort connected with intellect and the arts encouraged; while every thing that could create a laugh, or add to the gayety of the moment, was sure to meet with the applause of Agnes, whose delight was sometimes to bring together the light poet and the grave philosopher, the sprightly dramatist and the sedate professor. It was here that C—— was sometimes heard for an hour in his elegant eulogiums upon Shakspeare—that M—— first read portions of his poems—and that young play-wrights first tried the wings of their dramatic muse.

It was in the midst of these small assemblies, which were sometimes really little congregations of contradiction, that Leslie, by the quantity of his superficial knowledge, by his correct memory, and his lively imagination, frequently contrived to shine pre-eminent; feeling, that in such a mind and heart as Agnes possessed, that admiration of talent was the very likely precursor to a warmer feeling.

On the present occasion, as the party were to break up so soon, there was nobody there who had not some early engagement; and among them, in addition to Mr. and Mrs. Henry Pomeroy, was the perpetual D'Oyley, a young and enthusiastic artist, the French *attaché*, and a regularly serious professor, who had been giving lectures at the Royal Society so totally subversive of all the pleasures of the imagination, and reducing every thing to so much philosophical reality,

that he had been nicknamed the "matter-of-fact" professor. Beneath a rough outside, however, it was said that he possessed a kindly heart, and in spite of his stoical system, it was whispered that he had a palate not at all insensible to good dinners and generous wines.

This worthy professor, on the day in question, was pursuing his usual theme—recommending temperance amidst the profusion of which he was partaking; praising the crust and water, and the tub of Diogenes, while feasting upon venison; and swallowing Burgundy and Champagne on a soft chair, beneath a gilded ceiling. From these subjects he turned to those which had proved the subjects of his disquisition at the society, and which, from their *bizarrerie*, more perhaps than from their scientific excellence, had brought the old gentleman into fashion, and threw him into a circle of society in which he sometimes found himself entirely out of his element, though nothing could daunt him out of the dogmatical tenacity with which he adhered to his opinions. The Frenchman's ears, eyes, and mouth, seemed to open to their utmost expansion as he strove to understand the arguments of the worthy doctor; but as he looked around at all the evident contradictions which the very apartment they were in afforded to the professor's arguments, he could only shrug up his shoulders and exclaim, "Oh, mon Dieu! je n'entends rien," swallow his champagne, and address himself again to his *potage*.

"Nay, nay," said Agnes, interrupting the professor in the midst of a tirade, in which he had attempted to prove there was nothing real in life, "do not, my dear sir, deprive us of every pleasure of existence. Surely you do not think the world the dull place which your argument would make of it; and say that all that we see, and hear, and feel, is deception."

"How, madam, can I change facts? it is precisely as I say; and were you well grounded in natural and experimental philosophy, you would yourself acknowledge it," returned the professor.

"Why, as to philosophy, sir," exclaimed, D'Oyley, "if there is anything in the world that I understand, it is philosophy; and I do pronounce yours to be of the most curious nature I have ever heard of."

"That may be, sir," drily observed the professor, "but it is nevertheless true."

"What, sir!" exclaimed Leslie, with affected indignation, "would you persuade me that all the beauties of nature with which my eye is delighted, and with which hill and valley are covered, and that the charms and pre-eminent graces of woman, which captivate the senses—the roses and lilies of her complexion—the softness of a blue, the lustre of a dark eye, or the piquancy of a hazel—or all that roundness of form, which constitutes symmetry—would you persuade me that all this, which I see and feel palpable to the touch, exists only in my imagination, and has no more foundation in reality, than the air-drawn dagger in Macbeth?"

"Precisely so, young gentleman," returned the professor. "It was the temptation to murder, the dream of inordinate ambition, that pourtrayed to the mental eye of Macbeth the dagger which "marshall'd him the way he was to go:" and I tell you, that it is the concupiscence of youth, the heat of the young blood, that acts upon the imagination of a man in love, as it is called, just as ambition did upon the mind of Macbeth; and his senses are the artists, which paint to his eye beauties, and colours, and roundness, and the other non-senses you mention which exist nowhere but in the chimera of his own brain."

"What, sir! do you persist then that every thing is seeming, that every appearance is deceitful, and that our senses are given us only to keep us in a state of perpetual illusion?"

"You've exactly hit it," said the professor. "There is not an appearance in what you call nature, that is real; we live in a dream surrounded by shadows and pictures, which are painted on the retina of our own imaginations, by our own preposterous fancies; as proofs of which, look at the sea, which appears to the eye as a flat surface, while in reality it is a part of a sphere. The sun, which appears to our sight about two feet in diameter, is in reality a million times larger than our earth. To turn from magnitudinal to minor points, observe this 'lady's finger,' as I believe it is the fashion to call these biscuits, which look like waxen tapers, but are eatables; as I plunge it in this goblet of water it appears bent, and yet we know that in reality it is straight. Look at yourself in that mirror, Mrs. Trevor, and your face appears looking at you from behind it; and as a farther proof that touch and sight are deceptive, that very glass, which appears so smooth and shining, is nothing but a mass of uneven cavities and convexities. Nay, even the skin of a beautiful

woman," taking the hand of Agnes, who sat next him, and which was freely given, "of this hand, for instance, which feels so soft, so smooth, so round, why," and the professor seemed affected by the touch, "why, even this skin is," and he was going to illustrate his argument by describing the pores, and the anatomy of the skin, when his eyes encountering those of Mrs. Trevor, the glance she gave him, and the touch of her soft hand, together with the gentle pressure of friendship with which it was accompanied, seemed to electrify the professor, put the whole train of his ideas to flight, and he was compelled to admit, amidst the laughter of the company, that there was some reality in the beauties, the existence of which his theory denied.

"Come, come, professor, acknowledge that there is more in the philosophy that I *do* understand, than there is in that which you would have taught me; and acknowledge, too, that women govern all things," said D'Oyley.

"I acknowledge no such thing, sir," said the philosopher, laying great stress upon the syllable *know;* and resuming the stoical expression of his countenance, which had unbent beneath the temporary influence of Agnes, "women are very well in their proper places."

"Ah, monsieur le philosophe, ne dites rien contre les dames—moi—I will break de lance in dere service."

"Aye, and a glass too, I perceive," said D'Oyley, as the energy of the little Frenchman occasioned the fracture of his Champagne glass against his dessert-plate. "Well, if there is anything I do understand, it is repartee."

"We feel much obliged by your rising in our defence," exclaimed Agnes: "yet is it not rather curious that a nation so famed for its gallantry and *politesse aux dames* as yours is, should be the only European kingdom in which they are excluded from the succession to the crown?"

"Ah, Madame! c'est trop vrai, et je le regrette infiniment. Mais Monsieur le Cardinal Mezeray dit que 'ce n'est pas qu'elles fussent incapables de gouvererr, puisqu'on leur a presque toujours accordé la régence; et un autre Cardinal, Monsieur Mazarin, a dit que plusieurs femmes étoient dignes de régir un royaume;'" and the polite Frenchman bowed with the self-satisfied air of having rescued his country from the stigma of a want of *politesse*.

"According to your account," said Leslie, "flattery seems to have been one of the cardinal virtues; though you forget

that Mazarin's compliment to the sex was a little embittered by the subsequent sentence, which he added by way of qualification, and in which he says, that though fit to govern a kingdom—' qu'il étoit toujours a craindre qu'elles ne se laissassent subjuguer par des amants incapables de gouverner douze poules,' and thus he came to the true kingdom of a woman's reign—the human heart, and by that she may not only govern a kingdom, but the universe. But yet," pursued he, "it is a remarkable fact in history, that you will find fewer queens than kings resigning themselves to the tender passions."

"Nay, recollect. Mary of Scotland," interrupted D'Oyley, and was going to boast of his understanding the matter better than anything else in the world—but Leslie went on—

"I do; and in opposition to the unhappy example of Mary, I will give you Isabella of Castile; in Hungary, Marie Thérèse; in Russia, Catharine; and though last, not the least splendid specimen of a queen, I will give you our own Elizabeth. None of these permitted any lovers to influence their government. The latter had her weaknesses, as well as her strength; but they were never permitted to interrupt the prosperity of her reign; and when a lover, (and scandal, or fame, or by whatever name rumour may be designated, says a happy one,) presuming on her favour, ventured to oppose her measures—we all know the catastrophe."

"Well, for my part," said the professor, who had listened very impatiently to doctrines so directly in opposition to his own, "I do not wish to see a woman either hold a sceptre herself, or have any influence with those who do. Her true throne is her domestic fireside. Her kingdom should be her home, and her *subjects* the family circle."

"Including the husband, of course, which brings it back exactly to my position, that women govern everything. Well, if there is anything I do understand, it is logic," said D'Oyley.

"And love governs women: *ergo*, love is king of the universe," exclaimed Leslie. "However, as to my friend the professor's idea," pursued he, knowing how delighted Agnes was to hear the intellect of her sex defended, "that a woman's throne is a stuffed arm-chair; her kingdom a nursery; her sceptre a rod; her crown a fool's cap, and her subjects a parcel of noisy brats and saucy servants; I do not at all agree with [illegible] are formed for higher

purposes than the mere drudgery of domestic life ; and though I do not wish to see a woman always in Minerva's helmet, I have no objection to the influence of her intellect in high quarters, calming the fiercer passions of man's nature ; nor to hear that the brightest jewel of a monarch's diadem is made to shine upon an offending minister by the merciful kindness of some highly-gifted woman."

Agnes looked her approbation.

"I tell you, sir," said the professor, who felt the dignity of man's prerogative wounded, "that what you are saying is an absurdity—an absurdity on the very face of it."

"Well then," replied Leslie, "it has at any rate the merit of not being a hypocritical absurdity, and therefore not likely to deceive."

The company smiled ; but the professor, who had no understanding whatever for a quibble, merely repeated, raising his voice, "I tell you, sir, it is an absurdity."

"But, my dear professor, absurdities have their use. The most difficult problems in Euclid are solved by absurdities. It is the true exposition of absurdity that makes the contrary more palpable : so that *your* argument ought to be obliged to *my* absurdity for proving its truth. I appeal to the ladies."

"Sir," said the professor, "as your absurdities have been uttered in defence of the ladies, no doubt they will, in return, rise in defence of your absurdities. But I look upon these matters philosophically."

"Oh, no doubt," exclaimed Leslie, "and like the natural philosopher in Paris, who, in the midst of an enthusiastic bumper of Burgundy, in which women were toasted as the delight of social life, as the purest and best pleasures sent us by Heaven for our enjoyment on earth, being appealed to for his opinion of woman, he phlegmatically defined her to be 'un animal moins fort que l'homme, moins grand, moins capable de longs travaux ; son sang plus aqueux, sa chair moins compacte, ses cheveux plus longs ; ses bras moins musculeux ; sa bouche plus petite.' And finished by gravely saying—'Ces caractères distinguent les femmes dans toute la terre, chez toutes les espèces, depuis la Japonie jusqu'à la côte de Guinée ; en Amérique comme à la Chine. Et voilà les femmes !'" exclaimed he, having by a definition worthy of Buffon, entirely destroyed the poetry of the subject.

"Well, but," said the professor, "all the poets are not on your side. If I remember, Virgil, over whom when a boy I

wasted a great deal of time, he never scarcely speaks well of them. He makes his Dido so changeable, that the destinies themselves cannot fix the time of her death; but Iris, the emblems of inconstancy, must determine it. As to Helen, so far from complimenting her as Homer does, he deliberates whether he shall not kill her; and when he once finds himself speaking a little favourably of Camilla, he seems to repent, and finishes by calling her 'aspera et horrenda virgo.' His fields of mourning too are all filled with women. He scarcely admits a man into his regions of repentance. So you see, sir," said the professor, delighted at his own recollections, "even the poets are not altogether in your favour."

"Why," answered Leslie, "in the solitary instance you have named, perhaps you may be correct; but recollect that Virgil was a swarthy, uncouth, and ungraceful man, with a sickly cast of countenance, and with gray hairs in green youth; a man not likely to be a favourite with the ladies, and therefore very likely to vituperate them; for I never heard anybody abuse them, excepting under these circumstances. Virgil stuttered too; as great an impediment to love as it is to speech. He was bashful and shy, and would slip into a corner to avoid the conversation of women; and that they don't like, Professor—"

"Unless they slip into the corner with you;" exclaimed D'Oyley, laughing at his own jest.

"Thus, you see, Virgil is not a fair person to argue by. Besides, Professor," proceeded Leslie, "you are mistaken if you imagine that love and admiration of the other sex were confined to poets. It is not only Anacreon and Ovid that have felt their power, but sages have joined in their praise; even Plutarch, the grave and reverend Plutarch, amid discussions of character, of history, and of politics, which were to form the minds of men for thousands of years, has prosed, if not poetized, the praises of love. In one of his discourses he says that the love of woman has something in it divine; he compares it to the sun, which animates nature; and, above all, he places the greatest happiness which man is capable of enjoying, in the exclusive love of one woman."

From this disquisition they turned to music; which the professor cried down with even more vituperation than he had done the fair sex. He compared the violin to the cries of the cat after her own entrails, said it was only invented to interrupt conversation; and that nothing was so contemptible as to be pleased by having one's ears tickled.

The Frenchman abused all music, excepting that of his own country; called that of the German "lourde;" said that the Italian "n'avoit autre qualité que la frivolité;" and that the French were the only people with whose music was mixed "beaucoup d'ame"—which words he uttered with much the same feeling as an *épicier* would measure out "beaucoup de sucre."

Leslie looked at him sarcastically, and quoted Rousseau, who called French singing "un lamentable chant François, qui avoit plus ressemblance aux cris de la colique qu'aux transports des passions."

"Why, then," exclaimed D'Oyley, "their chorus must have been a 'roar loyal,' as if they all had the colic together. Well, if there is any thing I do understand, it is music.

Leslie, knowing music to be one of the master passions of Agnes, then spoke of it with enthusiasm, as an adjunct to poetry. He called Handel the Michael Angelo of musicians; said that he made sounds do the duty of colours. "Could Claude himself," exclaimed he, "have produced a finer landscape than is portrayed in the pastoral symphony which precedes the recitative of 'There were Shepherds,' in The Messiah? The song of the drowsy birds dropping into their nests, the setting sun, the bleating flocks, the waking shepherds—all these things are not only audible, but visible, in this delightful composition. What can more gratify the senses, the mind, and the imagination—what can be a more intellectual treat than the performance of this magnificent work, amid the fretted vault and pillared aisle, where the stolen choristers mingle their voices with the pealed organ, and where the music derives additional power from the solemn and sad recollection of the meeting of the living and the dead beneath the same sacred edifice?"

This apostrophe of Leslie's was so enthusiastic, that it occasioned a complete silence. It was with a sentence of this kind, which he knew was so completely in unison with the feelings of Agnes, that he delighted to finish his conversations in her presence. He was perfectly aware of the congeniality of what he had said with her own sentiments: he knew the favourable impression that it left upon her mind; and, from her softened countenance, pensive eye, and thoughtful air, he felt that what he had just said had made a deeper one than usual.

The party broke up. Trevor, Leslie, and Agnes, proceeded to the Opera, where the excuse planned between the two former for the absence of Trevor was soon put in execution; and the careless husband was soon behind the curtain *aux troisièmes*, leaving his neglected and beautiful wife open to the insidious attentions of Leslie *aux premières*.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A CATASTROPHE.

An army royal of women are too few for him.
BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

What are thy fruits, oh lust? short blessings, bought
With long remorse; the seed of bitter thought.
SAVAGE.

LESLIE TO VILLARS.

I AM just returned, Fred, from the opera, where I have gazed at nothing else, listened to nothing else, talked to nothing else; in short, have had eyes, ears, and tongue for no one else than this angel woman. Why is she not more of woman and less of an angel? then, perhaps—yes, then—and must we always reduce the scale of these creatures' virtues before we make them ours? Surely this is a defect in nature's composition, that the very thing for which these delicious women were formed, reduces them from perfection. Yet it is not nature that does this; 'tis habit, 'tis custom, 'tis the cursed conventional forms of the arbitrary few, who from stoicism and insensibility have elected themselves lawgivers, and placed our natural passions in chains. And who are these Lycurguses and Solons of society? why are we to adopt their opinions as fiats, and vetos, and boundaries, that we are not to surpass? and why are they so hard upon poor "womankind?" How, as I gazed upon this——but I will not call her names—and turned away with a sick heart to the contemplation of

the cold dull scene on the stage!—how did I wish for a Mephistophiles at my elbow, whom I might have commanded to have sunk every thing before me into some yawning abyss, and have left me alone with Agnes Trevor on some silent, solitary spot, with no other light than the pale lamp of night, and no other eyes but those that stud the sky with stars. But unluckily a mental Mephistophiles can only suggest ideas of what might be, without the power to say they shall be; and the days of "Faust" are gone by.

I wonder, Fred, whether she really is what she seems: whether, if there were the certainty, the absolute certainty of concealment from all the world—whether, like other women, she would——no—no—no, I am afraid that—

> ——————— if only
> The midnight moon and silent stars had seen it,
> She would not live to be reproached by them;
> But dig down deep to find a grave beneath,
> And hide her from their beams.

This would be very foolish and very obstinate, supposing it had come to pass; but I am afraid 'tis true; and I have a great deal to do yet. But before I proceed I must tell you of an adventure that I have just met with, which makes more impression on my mind than it deserves; perhaps the greater, from the complete contrast of her who is the heroine of it to her whom I had just quitted.

I told you in a former letter of my having met a drunken woman in the street, who demanded imperiously if my name was not Leslie; of my denying it; of my seeing her again the next day, when the whole circumstance had passed into utter oblivion with her, and when she denied all knowledge of me.

Well, two or three times after this, I met her as I have sometimes walked home from my parties or my club; and whenever she was intoxicated she always addressed me by my name, but when sober, appeared utterly unconscious of knowing me. In short, if she really does know me, her senses seem to move precisely in the inverse ratio to those of other people; for liquor restores her recollection, instead of destroying it. This had excited my curiosity, and I had determined to make La Tour follow her, and discover something of her history the next time that I should encounter her.

To-night my carriage, owing to the immense crowd, was at the top of the Haymarket, and having put Agnes into Trevor's

chariot, I was impatient to be alone, to give myself up to all the delicious recollection of an evening spent entirely with her. I determined therefore to walk to my carriage. My whole mind was filled with ideas of the charming Agnes; I lived again over every expression of her lip and eye; I was almost insensible to the surrounding cries of "Coach, your honour," "Light, your honour," and all the horrid noises that invade one's ear on a *sortie* from an English theatre, when I found myself suddenly seized by the arm; a hand was pressed forcibly upon my breast, so as to keep my face just in the light of a gas-lamp, while a voice uttered, or rather hoarsely screamed, "Yes, yes, thou art Leslie! thou *art* LESLIE!" I started from the grasp, and beheld before me the same woman, in a state of intoxication bordering on madness. Her eye-balls glared; her mouth foamed; her matted hair streamed in the winds; a loose red handkerchief attempted in vain to confine the bloated and unnatural protuberances which had once formed a bosom, within their proper boundaries. She was covered *cap-à-pied* with mud, the fruits of sundry rollings in sundry gutters; and as she waved her arms in the air, and then placing one in her side, and again seizing me with the other, stood across my path, you would really have imagined her some demon from the infernal regions. And then her glazed and fixed look; the hoarse guttural sounds that issued from her throat, and which passion and intoxication prevented her from embodying into words, excepting now and then that they condensed themselves into something like an imprecation, while the breath with which they were uttered came rolling in my face, impregnated with the fumes of gin, and all the "impure spirits of the vasty deep" of her capacious stomach. Really, Fred, it half unmanned me; and then her hellish laugh, when I attempted to shake her off, with the words, "Woman, unhand me;" for I was civil, Fred, and called the devil *woman* against my conscience. "Woman!" she repeated, and this time her breath did find words in a voice of thunder. "Woman!" she repeated, and then burst into a loud "Ha! ha! ha!" that absolutely drowned the noise of the watchmen's rattles in its loud reverberations. Intemperance had made sad inroads upon the poor devil's countenance and figure since I had seen her last. Her complexion, which, as the strong gas-light fell upon it, I perceived was first flushed and red, turned gradually to a bluish green, such as we have seen in

our boyish days, when we have burned salt before our faces. It absolutely startled the watchmen, as they seized her to release the "gentleman," or "gemman," as they called it for shortness (and the shorter perhaps the better), from her intrusion. La Tour, who had by this time come up to see what detained me, absolutely jumped a yard high, as with a strength almost Herculean she shook the worthy guardians of the night from her; and again screaming out the word "woman," I felt her fingers relax in their firm grasp. Her whole form seemed to shrink into weakness; her voice assumed a softness almost feminine, as she exclaimed—"Woman! yes, I *was once*—a woman!" A stream of blood gushed from her nose, and she fell flat upon the pavement, striking her head with such violence against the curbstone, that the *lourd* sound (I can't find an English word) still vibrates on my ear. The moment they saw her thus overpowered by her own passions, the valiant keepers of the peace rushed upon her as their prey, and would have dragged her neck and heels to the watch-house had not my humanity interfered.

Struck by the evident temporary insanity of the poor devil, I threw the watchmen a guinea, and desiring them to be careful of her, I ordered La Tour to accompany them to the watch-house to see that my commands were obeyed, and that she was lodged in safety, at least for the night. As they bore her away she struggled faintly, and my quick ear still caught the name of "Leslie" mixed up with the word "damnation." I say, Fred, that would look ominous did we believe in such a thing, and if this poor devil were a sibyl. Well, there 's my adventure for you:—what think you of it? Can it be possible that this wretch and Agnes Trevor are of the same sex? Is there not a third species not yet admitted into the distinctions of the historians of human nature?

Some physiologists have imagined a gradation of beings from gods to devils; and if their hypothesis be true, this Slashing Nan, as the guardsmen call her, must be about a thousand degrees down the scale towards the latter. And yet, Fred, this wretch had all the attributes of woman. But who in that wild, and bloated, and livid countenance, those pale compressed lips, overflowing with blood and saliva, that dirty matted mane, rather than hair, and those hollow sunken

cheeks, covered with a confused mixture of vermilion and perspiration, could recognise a woman's lovely countenance?

> ——————————that little round,
> In which you may observe a world of sweet variety;
> For coral lips; for threads of purest gold,
> Hair; for delicious choice of flowers, cheeks;
> Wonder in every portion of that form.

A strange fancy is come over me, and I cannot drive it from my mind. I am imagining Agnes Trevor, the lovely idol of my waking thoughts, the object of my nightly dreams, in whose form nature seems to have been prodigal of beauties, and to have "made her up of every woman's best" reduced to such a wretch as this. It is a strange fancy, is n't it, Fred? and yet my mind is pursuing it with a tenacity which I cannot resist, and which traces the gradual change of every beauty into some loathsome deformity. 'Tis a strange freak of nature, that the extremities of loveliness and loathsomeness should by turns be the attributes of the same form; and strange, too, that we should sometimes loathe what we have loved; and yet 'tis natural, at least we have found it so, have n't we, Fred?

Oh, here 's La Tour; what the devil ails the fellow? he looks aghast; he is as pale as the pillow-case, and trembles as though he had the tertian ague.—Oh, dead—is she? Poor devil!—well—what is that to me?—what 's that you say, scoundrel? It can't be—it must be a lie—a damn'd lie—

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No wonder, Fred, that I stopped writing, and so you 'll say when you hear all. Who the deuce do you think this poor creature is, or rather was, for she is now a thing that has been, and is reckoned among the pasts instead of the presents. I don't much like that word *was*, when it is applied to creatures of our own species, and puts us in mind that we too may one day be reckoned among the "has beens." Well, but who do you think she was? from the description I have just given of her you will never guess; so I may as well tell

you. Don't start though, a yard from your chair, as I did—but it was poor Fanny Pearson! Yes, the once lovely Fanny Pearson!

Do you remember, Fred, when we first saw her in her father's parsonage in Cornwall, when our confounded chaise was overturned, and my leg nearly broken by the accident? Do you remember how pale she became as the clumsy country Esculapius turned and twisted my ancle about, as though the joint was made of some of the iron out of his native mines? Even now I feel a twinge at the recollection. And at night, do you remember the family circle? the old parson with his full-bottomed wig and placid countenance? his wife, the venerable Lady Bountiful of her husband's parishioners, with her eternal smile and mob cap, and the thousand and one recipes for a sprained ancle, which the beauty of their only daughter had induced me to magnify into a serious accident, as an excuse for prolonging my stay? and above all, do you remember the then blooming Fanny, with those clustering golden locks that hung over her large blue eyes, while she "plied the busy needle," and listened to the tales of all "the dangers we had passed" in the Peninsula, which, like Othello, we related to their wondering ears.

The whole scene is now before me. I again feel myself snug in the old gentleman's easy-chair, with my foot usurping the empire of his gouty stool, while my eye rested on the clean white window-curtains, the cheerful fire, the hissing tea-kettle, and fragrant souchong, handed to me by what I then thought the prettiest little hand in the world; while you played such havoc among that large haycock of toast and butter, which the old lady's hospitality had provided for thy ravenous appetite, for thou always hadst a most unromantic love of eating.

And then the simplicity of the old gentleman; his love for, and his ignorance of politics; his wonder at the difference of Oxford in his time and in ours; and then those damnable corkscrew faces of yours, when he proposed to us to join in the family prayer, during which you fell into the soundest nap that ever mortal was blest with: for you are a mere mortal as to sleeping and eating! But above all, Fred, do you remember poor Fanny, with her blooming cheeks, shaking back her clustering locks, and arresting the progress of her needle in the most interesting stitch of the collar which she was working, to listen to your account of my swimming the

Douro in the face of the enemy's fire;—we were always each other's trumpeters you know. Then the side-long glance that I caught her casting at me as a large crystal drop of liquid dew forced itself through her long dark lashes, and stole over her soft cheek, while that bosom, so carefully concealed by its snow-white drapery, heaved and fluttered with agitations, till then unknown to her. And can that be the same bosom which I saw a couple of hours since, by the light of the gas-lamp in the Haymarket, bruised and swollen, and exposed to the rude gaze, and still ruder hands of watchmen and street-keepers? To think, Fred, that any thing so lovely should come to this; but 'tis the way of every thing. Cabbages, you know, are now growing in the palaces of the Cæsars; and where Horace lounged and Cicero harangued, the modern Romans now cleanse ther heads and kill their pigs:

> To such vile uses must we come at last.
>
> Imperious Cæsar, dead and turned to clay,
> Might stop a hole to keep the wind away.

All this is melancholy, is n't it, Fred? But what matters it?

> Women to cards may be compared; we play
> A round or two, when us'd we throw away;
> Take a fresh pack, nor is it worth our grieving,
> Who cuts or shuffles with our dirty leaving.

Then, Fred, do you remember the night she left the parsonage; a cold clear night in September, with a sky studded with stars? Dost remember watching window after window in the humble, though pretty mansion, as they successively darkened, till there was a light only to be seen in one, and that was her's? and dost remember how anxiously we watched the shadow of her figure as she passed between the light and the white dimity curtain, and imagined at every motion her little preparations for flight? I compared it at the time, you know, to the *ombres Chinoises*, with which we used to amuse our sisters during the holydays.

I think I again hear her soft step stealing down the staircase, and again tremble with the fear I felt that she would not come, as I for a moment lost the sound: and which she afterwards told me was occasioned by her sinking on her knees at her father's door, and uttering a prayer that God would bless him! What strange creatures these women

are! They pray upon every emergency, whether they are saints or sinners! Then came the trembling drawing back of the bolt; then the cursed creaking of the door, that kept us breathless as the wind before a summer storm; and then —she was in my arms—hurried along the little gravel walk, catching with her hand at every tree and flower in our path, and almost clinging to the little wicket entrance, which she was never to pass again. Dost remember, Fred, the autumnal leaves falling upon us as we fled, and the cloud that passed over the moon as I lifted her into the chaise, the door of which was held open by that imperturbable La Tour—that fellow has no feeling—and then the river of tears that gushed over my breast, till I was absolutely wet through with her grief? Fred, we are sad dogs, and I have been thus particular in my reminiscences by way of penance; the recollection will do us good; and I should have been quite unhappy if I had not given the watchman the guinea to take care of her, and sent La Tour to see that it was n't thrown away.

Poor Fanny! the only thing she wanted to make her perfect, was a little knowledge of the world, and that I gave her. Who would have thought that she would have made such a use of it?

It is really quite lamentable, Fred, to think what rapid and prodigious strides these women make in profligacy, when they are once embarked in its paths. Now, you, or I, or any other man, would have been five hundred years in attaining that summit of vice to which poor Fanny had arrived. Yes, man is a slow animal in these matters; but woman—she is like a letter conveyed by the new process of creating a vacuum, and arrives at her destination at once. We now, go on gradually.—With us

> Ill habits gather by unseen degrees,
> As brooks make rivers—rivers run to seas.

Then women *sometimes* take to drinking; and that helps them on prodigiously. By the bye, I suppose Milton, in his description of woman's first formation, had an eye to this destructive inclination in the sex, when he made Adam say—

> Who stooping, open'd my left side, and took
> From thence a rib—with CORDIAL SPIRITS warm.

Good night, Fred!

## CHAPTER VII.

### ALIENATION.

He looked on her and loved her; and used all means
Of service, courtship, presents, that might win her
To be at his devotion.

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

About this period a circumstance came to the knowledge of Leslie, which he was in hopes would enable him to ascend another step of the ladder, the top of which he was so desirous to attain. He had discovered a *quondam* mistress of Trevor's, from whom he had separated on account of her infidelities and profligacy. She was in great poverty. He immediately saw the advantage that he might make of this discovery, and accordingly, relieving the distresses of this woman, he tutored her in the part she was to act; and by showing to her how much she might obtain by the plan, kept her faithful to his purpose, and as anxious as himself for the success of his scheme.

The story of Julia Stanton's distress was feelingly described by Flounce in her lady's dressing-room. A tale of wo was sure to excite the commiseration of Agnes; and this was never excited without a plan for the relief of the object.

Incognita, and attended only by Flounce, she sought the lodgings of this woman, whom she found apparently suffering as much from the agonies of remorse, as from the pressure of disease and poverty. Sickness had only given a more delicate character to her beauty, and had thus rendered her more interesting.

She appeared to receive the visit of Agnes with a modest diffidence, and a painful sense of her own unworthiness; but declined the offered relief, by stating that her necessities had been alleviated by an unknown hand. She wept, as words of comfort and kindness were poured into her ear, and by degrees unbosomed herself of such a tale of unprincipled seduction and heartless desertion, as excited by turns the in-

dignation and pity of Agnes. But when at the conclusion of this sad story she named Trevor as the man to whose arts she had fallen a victim, Agnes started with horror; a sickness came over her heart, and she would have fainted, had she not been caught by Flounce: to whom, nevertheless, she had sufficient presence of mind to give a signal not to betray her.

The seduction alone, to such a rightly-judging, high-principled mind as that of Agnes, was sufficiently horrible; but for this there might be the apology of passion—of temptation; but the desertion of a victim who had been sacrificed to a moment's sensual pleasure struck her with horror. For this there was no apology to be found in all the sophistry which is so often exerted to palliate a crime, the results of which are incalculable. This part of the story was pregnant with that heartlessness, which Agnes considered as the greatest crime with which a human being could be stigmatized.

"And is this the man," exclaimed she mentally, "that I have loved? Is this the being upon whom I depended for all my hopes of happiness, and to whom I have sacrificed it?" What a question for such a heart as hers! What a scene to destroy all the future prospects of a wife, who had for years anticipated the pleasures of domestic enjoyment; and who, in spite of her present pursuits, was still calculating that the quiet of the country, the revisiting of those scenes where they had first been enjoyed, might restore those hours which she still recollected as the brightest of her existence.

All these thoughts pressed upon her mind with that quickness with which a thousand unpleasant feelings will sometimes crowd upon one's heart in the short space of a moment.

Steps were now heard ascending the staircase to the upper-floor, occupied by Julia; and before Flounce could prevent it, which she pretended to do, the door opened, and, to the extreme surprise of Agnes, La Tour entered—starting, however, at the scene that presented itself—Julia in her crocodile tears—Agnes nearly fainting on a chair—and Flounce in the apparent act of stopping his entrance, but standing still, with signs of astonishment at his appearance: he hastily retreated, and flew down the stairs much more quickly than he had ascended them, in spite of Julia's exclamation of—"Oh, my benefactor! my saviour!"

To the earnest inquiries of Agnes, Julia replied—that La Tour had been the medium through which the hand of some

superior had relieved her. His master, she believed, was her benefactor; but the name had been so carefully concealed, that though she believed it came from some friend of her seducer, who had by accident, or perhaps through himself, heard of her wants, she had been left in uncertainty.

That it was Leslie who had thus sought out the victim of her husband's heartlessness, and afforded her that relief which it was the duty of Trevor to have accorded, and which was the only reparation in his power to make for the injury she had sustained at his hands, Agnes could not doubt. What a dangerous contrast was this to be presented to her imagination! What a dangerous comparison for the mind and heart of a wife to make!

The propriety of her feeling, at once pointed out to her the first source from which this relief ought to have sprung, and as it appeared to have been denied there, the second was from herself; and she at once besought Julia to refuse any farther succour from La Tour, and placing a sum of money in her hands for present exigencies, stated her intention of making her an annual allowance equal to all moderate wants.

This settled, she escaped from the oppressive expressions of Julia's gratitude, and returned home with enough upon her mind to furnish food for many a reflection, subversive of all present peace, and pregnant with danger to her future happiness.

Unfitted for society by the scene of the morning, she gave "Not at home" orders, and shut herself up in her *boudoir* for the whole day, resigned to the variety of thoughts and feelings which that scene had engendered in her mind;—thoughts and feelings, alas! which were any thing but favourable to her happiness as a wife.

Very early after their union had Agnes discovered how very superficial were the qualities for which she had loved Trevor. A few weeks of unreserved intercourse betrayed how slight were the mental resources and accomplishments he possessed, and how flimsy were his pretensions to that genius and talent for which her young and partial heart had given him credit. The fact was, she had been blinded by the ardour of his passion for her, and the obstinacy with which he pursued her.

The determination to accomplish his wishes, in spite of all opposition, gave to him a temporary energy, which she thought had been one of the integral ingredients of his cha-

racter. She had been flattered by this determination, and not having been acquainted with the intermediate circumstances of his life, from the time of his first meeting her at the juvenile ball, to that in which he proposed himself for her husband, she, naturally enough, gave him credit for a constancy, which, of all other feelings, was the farthest from the nature of Trevor.

Light, volatile, vain, and a sensualist, all the impressions he received were slight; and his senses once gratified, that inherent longing after novelty, which is one of the great characteristics of sensual enjoyment, took possession of his heart, and a new object soon banished the power of every other from his mind and feelings.

For his deficiency in the talent, for his want of the genius, with which it had pleased her young fancy to deck out her lover, she did not blame him: it was her fault for having imagined them, not his that he did not possess them.

She had heard, and read, and imagined the perfections of a lover, and gave these perfections to her own, of course. She loved him, and consequently painted him all that she wished him to be. He, his senses charmed for the moment, and determined to succeed, agreed with her sentiments in every thing, as he would have done had they been quite contrary to what they were; and she placed this to the account of congeniality of disposition. In short, she suffered her affection to give a colour to every thing; and looking through a false medium, no wonder that judgment was deceived, when she suffered fancy to be so predominant.

As Diderot is said to have recommended many foolish dramas, which had been read to him by their authors, from the circumstance of his having permitted his own imagination and fancy to work up the subject in his mind, and after his own manner, during their perusal, without attending to one word that was actually read to him, so had Agnes dressed up her lover in the colours of her own imagination, and had taken him upon her own fancied conception of his character, instead of upon any of the evidences which might have enabled her to judge of its reality.

Her feelings were in his favour, and she followed their impulse.

In all this, however, she was ready to blame herself. Her heart ached at her disappointment, but she loved him still; her feelings had been too warm to subside, and it required

but common attention on Trevor's part to have kept alive her affections, and to have preserved her love and esteem, though he might lose her admiration.

She made up her mind to view the tinsel of his accomplishments as tinsel, and to look to his heart, and not to his head; to his goodness, and not to his talent, as the qualities that deserved her love.

But when she found that he was heartless as well as shallow, when circumstance after circumstance came to her knowledge, and forced upon her the conviction of his want of principle and feeling, it was then that came the death-pang which shook her affections to their very foundation.

That he should have had amours in the progress of his youth, was not strange; nor did she feel this; but that he should have heartlessly deserted the objects of his passions, and literally left the victims of his sensuality, the beings whom he had sought for pleasure, and with whom he had found it, to starve for the want of common necessaries, and for that assistance which a stranger would have rendered them, her heart bled to feel the worthlessness of the object on which she had thrown herself away; and shuddered at the dreadful certainty that she could no longer love him with that fervency by which she had once described and felt that the love of a wife ought to be characterized.

The want of feeling was in the mind of Agnes the greatest of crimes. Cold-heartedness was the only thing for which she could find no excuse in all the vocabulary of her own kind feelings. Imprudence, carelessness, neglect, nay, even infidelity, she could perhaps have forgiven: but to want feeling was to be capable of all these without the hope of repentance.

She had hitherto repressed these feelings; had endeavoured to forget them; had striven to hope;—yes, absolutely *strive* to hope that many of her surmises were untrue; but this tale of Julia, this eye-witnessing of one of the effects of his heartlessness and depravity, had indeed brought conviction too much home to be denied, even by a heart that wished to find its fears devoid of foundation.

At this period, with his usual versatility, his manner became again attentive; he was more at home; and he seemed again to seek her society with his former pleasure. But soon the influence of fashion, that love of pleasure and notoriety, that unresisted custom of acting upon any impulse that gave him

the hope of a moment's entertainment, led him away; and the insidious Leslie, ever at his elbow to urge him on in his career of folly, he soon relapsed into the fashionable husband, and scarcely ever appeared at home, excepting when his wife's parties presented greater hope of play or pleasure than his club, or those of any other persons of fashion in his circle.

The whole of this conduct was encouraged by Leslie, who cultivated every evil propensity of his nature, by forming parties for play, or pointing out and describing objects of intrigue, and by leading him into every species of fashionable notoriety, either by example, or by urging him into them by that ridicule which was his never-failing weapon when a qualm of conscience would come over him with regard to his wife; and which, in spite of all his folly, was sometimes the case, when some act of her goodness to others, or kindness to himself, was thrust upon his notice.

In the mean time that Leslie apparently tried to conceal all these derelictions of Trevor from his duty, he contrived that they should, by other and sure means, find their way to the ear of Agnes, with whom it was his task to palliate them, thus constituting himself the husband's best friend, and laying a fair claim by such conduct to the wife's confidence.

In all his interviews with her, it was his practice to find excuses for Trevor, and yet to leave off with a wonder that any man could be so blind to his own happiness; but he never permitted an expression that she could construe into any declaration of what his own feelings would have been, had he been so placed. He was too much a master of his art for this stale covert way of declaring his sentiments; and he knew that if she once took the alarm while her heart was still untouched or still vacillating, that there would be an end to his hopes for ever.

All he did, therefore, was to increase his intimacy with both parties; to be the means of bringing Trevor frequently to his own home, at the same time that he made Agnes feel that it was to his influence that she owed the society of her husband.

When hour after hour would elapse without his appearance, and party after party had been explored, with no Trevor to be found, he would always try to frame some excuse, which appeared to arise from the kindest of mo-

tives, to both his friend and his wife, while it was sure to leave a painful impression on the mind of Agnes.

Sick and disappointed, her heart still glowing with all its warmth and feeling, no wonder that she at first felt like a being left alone in the world. It was in vain that she cherished the hope of still loving her husband; his conduct would not permit her to do it, even if her heart could have sanctioned an oblivion that could never come; and daily did the little influence which he retained in her heart diminish, till she found herself, in spite of all her efforts to the contrary, in the miserable situation of a wife more than indifferent to the only being whom she had a legitimate right to love.

It was in vain that she urged to herself the duty she owed him as a husband. In vain recollected the obligations she had entailed upon herself by the sacred ceremony which bound her to him. She had, alas! been too much the creature of feeling, for mere form to guide her affections, when feeling was gone; and could not but acknowledge to herself that affection had vanished, and that it was impossible for her to conjure up to her own mind even the semblance of a love she no longer experienced. Here was a state for such a heart as hers; a heart overflowing with all the kindliest, all the warmest feelings of our nature; a heart that, from its earliest infancy, had felt the necessity of loving; and whose warmest effusions were now condemned to be sent forth, like Noah's dove, from the ark of her own bosom into the wide world, and to return without finding a resting-place upon which they might repose with safety.

As the dreams of her imagination faded, the world appeared a blank. It presented nothing to fill up the void which the decay of her love for Trevor had left. Books and solitude but encouraged this feeling of desolation; and she sought a refuge from herself and her thoughts in society. She plunged into all the dissipation which her rank in life authorized. Her tables were covered with visiting-tickets; her drawing-room crowded by everything and everybody that was gay, careless, or fashionable, and a certain dread, that the absence of one folly might create the necessity for another, gave a sort of recklessness to her mind and heart, that made her seek a kind of mental intoxication in the enjoyment of society.

It was the ambition of everybody to be upon her list; be-

cause to be upon it made a person at once somebody, and not to be upon it was literally to be nobody.

Leslie gave his powerful influence to this ascendancy; and by his example, made Trevor's house the resort of all the exclusives among the young men of fashion: and though it is generally supposed that the ladies are the great attraction in society, yet it is well known among the caterers of fashion, that where there is a preponderancy of young men, there will likewise be the most numerous assemblage of the other sex. The fact is, there is a mutual attraction; and it is a good thing for all the purposes of society that it is so.

Leslie watched all the movements of the heart of Agnes with a wary eye, and understood them completely. He had soon discovered the wane of her attachment to Trevor, which he knew must be the natural consequence of his conduct, aided by his own plans. He foresaw the complete history of her heart and feelings; and threw in the episode of Julia Stanton, by way of an utter extinction of all those lingering sentiments of affection and esteem, to which the heart clings with so much tenacity, and which it abandons with so much regret, for the object of one's first love. His own conduct in this affair, he was, of course, in hopes might be the foundation of the new feelings he wished to create. He anticipated the vacancy her heart must feel at first, and rejoiced that she fled to dissipation as a relief, instead of to solid reflection: as he knew that nothing so much relaxes the firmness of a woman's principle as the perpetual pursuit of pleasure. He knew, too, that Agnes would find all the pleasures of fashionable society insufficient. He knew that she would look back with regret to the affections from which she had promised herself so much happiness: he judged that her heart would yearn after some new object upon which to place them; and he hoped, by skilful management, that he might himself become that object.

The first grand step, the complete alienation of her affections from her husband, was accomplished: and he began from this to anticipate the full success of his enterprise.

This very circumstance, however, debarred him from a number of privileges which he had hitherto enjoyed. It was no longer necessary for him to form excuses for Trevor, and build up an idea of his own amiability by doing so. There was no longer any necessity for those little confidences which could not but exist between them while he was considered

in her eye, in some measure, the guardian of the man she loved; her not loving him any longer, destroyed half the interest which she had taken in his conversation when it turned upon her husband; and there was no longer that one subject to draw them together, and to form a perpetual excuse for *tête-à-têtes*, which he dared not yet use any otherwise than for the purpose for which they were designed. There was no subject in common between them; and Leslie felt the loss of this.

It was now a matter of indifference to her whether Trevor attended her parties or not; so that Leslie found that one great motive of their peculiar intimacy was at an end.

Her mind was, however, impressed favourably towards him. Her heart was vacant. His conduct to her had cleared him with her from many of the imputations with which his character was loaded with regard to his libertinism. He had successfully instilled into her mind that he had been libelled in the character which the world gave him; he had excited her admiration of his talents and accomplishments, and her gratitude by the part which she had supposed him to have acted with regard to Trevor; and, above all, he had established an intimacy of feeling, a mutuality of sentiment, that she could have with no other person. Thus circumstanced, Leslie was thrown upon his own resources; he was no more to be aided in his schemes by the husband of his victim, excepting so far as his absence gave him the opportunity for their prosecution.

He knew her heart too well to fancy that it could be long satisfied with the life she led; and he determined so to model himself, as to appear the best *appui* on which her wounded feelings could repose themselves.

As he had formerly sympathised with her in her husband's neglect, and felt that *she* had *felt* that sympathy—for one always feels these things—he now turned his sympathy in another direction, and seemed to lament that a heart and mind so constituted for better things, should be compelled to devote themselves to such heartless pursuits. He ridiculed the society by which they were so often surrounded: he pointed out the heartlessness of one, and the folly of another: portrayed the domestic strife of some, and the conjugal indifference of others: enveighed, in measured terms, against ties which bound dissimilar people together for their lives: and would finish with an animated description of the happi-

ness which love might yield to two persons of similar sentiments.

He had discovered her romantic disposition, and could dress up many of the early adventures of his own life in all the glowing colours of romance, but say so little of himself as to *éviter* the charge of egotism, and yet leave the impression on the mind of his hearers that he had been the principal actor in the scenes he was describing.

Yet all this he tried to manage so as to escape the notice of others. He knew that a whisper once conveyed to her ear that his attentions were observed, would ruin his schemes for ever, should such a circumstance occur before he had made an impression upon her heart.

He seldom, therefore, danced with her above once or twice of an evening; but he devoted himself to make these quadrilles so delightful by his conversation, and contrived afterwards to make her dance with persons whose insipidity of character was such a contrast to his own, that she could not but feel the difference. At supper or dinner he seldom sat next to her, but always within reach of her; and here again he generally managed so that some simpleton of such rank as entitled him to the privilege, should hand her down, that he might again benefit by the contrast: and he not only called up all the natural resources of his wit to render this contrast the greater, but he read incessantly to store his mind with such new matter and information, as rendered him a most desirable companion to one of such an inquiring and energetic mind as Agnes possessed.

When it was announced, it was still the same simple patrician who led her to her carriage; but it was Leslie who always contrived, unnoticed amidst the crowd of departures, to wrap the Cashmere closely round her form, and to whisper apprehensions for her health, with his "good night," in a tone which frequently conveyed to her mind the whole history of her past life, from the sympathy which it bespoke.

It was his plan that every bright spot in her present existence should emanate from himself. If she had an agreeable recollection or anticipation, he contrived, by some means or other, that they should arise from something which he had said or done, or something which he had proposed.

In short, had he but taken half the pains for the gratification of a virtuous passion, there is not a woman in the world who could have resisted him. But it is ever the fate of

man to labour more after illegitimate objects than legitimate ones.

It takes double the talent and labour to be a thief than an honest man; yet the one leads to the gallows, and the other to respectability.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A REMONSTRANCE.

SIR HARRY. Dost think a sermon, man, preached by such prosing lips as yours, can put aside the hope of kisses I expect from hers? Can cold advice put out hot love? No, no. So spare my ears, and your own breath, good Mr. Sage.

COMEDY.

As to the other persons of our drama, they moved on during this period, precisely according to their various characters. Amelia, still as cold, and formal, and fashionable as ever, was not aroused out of her usual routine of feeling, or rather want of feeling, by becoming the mother of a beautiful boy. Her *accouchement* was attended with all the etiquette that the knowledge of Lady Pomeroy could press into her service on the occasion. Dr. Clark, and a nurse who had officiated on such occasions, with two or three countesses and marchionesses, were in attendance in their various capacities; knockers and bells were muffled; the street covered with straw; and every thing conducted perfectly *en règle*.

Henry Pomeroy was delighted at being a father, and would have spent the whole day in his wife's apartment, and have officiated as principal nurse, had his mother permitted it. He was very anxious that Amelia should perform all the maternal duties herself; and even ventured to suggest that those who consigned such a sweet task to others, were really scarcely more than half the mothers of their own children. All his remonstrances, however, could make no alteration in

the determination of Lady Pomeroy that her daughter-in-law should not be made a wet-nurse: it was only for vulgar people to follow the course of nature, and spoil their figures; and quite out of the question for people of fashion to do such things. So poor Henry was condemned to see the child of his delighted affection draw its sustenance from a stranger's bosom, and compelled to make love to a buxom nursery-maid for the pleasure of nursing his own son.

Amelia was perfectly recovered at the end of a week, but propriety and etiquette required the confinement of a month; and a full month was accordingly permitted to elapse ere the cards of "thanks for obliging inquiries" were issued. The farce of churching was then performed in her own *boudoir;* and Amelia again appeared as blooming as ever, and with as few cares upon her heart and brow as before she had become a mother.

With Lady Pomeroy and Amelia, Trevor's conduct, being fashionable, was passed over as all right; but with his sister, and with Hartley, it was different. They both trembled at the position in which their friend Agnes was placed; they both foresaw the total wreck of her hopes unless Trevor could be brought to his senses; and the one knowing Leslie, and the other suspecting him, both, without communicating with each other, had the same thoughts on the subject, and trembled for the happiness of Agnes, though neither of them had even a glimpse of suspicion of her honour.

With these feelings they both watched the movements of the Trevors with anxious solicitude, each afraid to disclose their opinions or their fears to any one else. The continuance of the same train of thought at length led to an *éclaircissement* between themselves, and thus the first step to mutual confidence between Hartley and Lady Emily was taken, through their mutual anxiety for their friend.

All, however, that they could do, was to lament in secret over the conduct of Trevor, and to sympathise with Agnes. Matters continued thus for some time: the alienation of Trevor and Agnes gradually became greater in reality, though not in appearance. At length Lady Emily ventured to argue with him on the absurdity of his conduct, and to represent its too probable consequences: he always sheltered himself under the example of others, and shook off every remonstrance with the unanswerable argument, that "every body did the same." In his own mind too, though almost without

acknowledging it to himself, he had such a thorough dependence upon the affection and principles of his wife, that the "probable consequences" hinted at by his sister were never once thought of with any thing resembling the slightest fear of their occurrence. He therefore pursued his usual course, and spent his whole time in gambling, at his clubs, or in the pursuit of some intrigue, which enabled him to preserve the character of a gay fellow, or which gave him some additional notoriety among that set to which he was proud to belong.

In the mean time Leslie became almost domesticated at Trevor House. He called in the morning immediately after breakfast, rallied Trevor for his perpetual domesticity while he was alone with him in his library, or when in the presence of Agnes, hinted at the happiness he might find at home did he stay there. He was then sure to start some subject, or mention some new attraction, which led Trevor out, and by that means secured himself the company of Mrs. Trevor for the rest of the morning; and all this was so well managed, that Trevor only felt obliged to him for preventing any unpleasant little matrimonial consequences arising from his absence, while Agnes thought she saw a tacit sympathy with her for her husband's neglect.

But Leslie still felt that all these manœuvres were useless; they did not *rapprocher* him to his main object; they seemed to make the way smooth, and yet there was the same insurmountable barrier to be passed over—the conveying a knowledge to her of his passion; nor could all his ingenuity, all his nightly thoughts and daily contrivances, imagine or carve out a method of doing this without creating such an alarm as his "tact" taught him would be fatal to his hopes for ever.

It was in vain that he recurred to all his experience; in vain he plotted and counterplotted; all he could do was to disguise his passion, his intentions, and his wishes, instead of explaining them.

He could mark all her struggling feelings at the evident neglect of her husband; he had read in the glistening eye, the slightly convulsed cheek, the contracted lip, the disappointment of early hope and affectionate anticipation, and he had watched these symptoms till he hoped they had gradually diminished into the indifference with which Trevor's neglect and absence were at present permitted.

Yet he saw that with all the depth of feeling, with all the susceptibility on which he had built his hopes, that there was at present no chance for him, and that hitherto all his sighs, all his sympathy, had gone for nothing. There was a high-souled feeling of honour implanted in her heart, that stood in the stead of principles engrafted by education, and of those founded on the rock of piety; the habit of *feeling* rightly had led her to *act* rightly, and a thought derogative to virtue, a sensation subversive of fastidious delicacy, had never crept into her mind. Temptation she never felt, because it was never thought of, and if she had thought of it, she would have imagined herself above it, and have spurned at the idea of anything that was wrong having the slightest influence over her.

Leslie knew, however, that she felt an interest for him; he knew that he had created gratitude by his apparent conduct with regard to Trevor, and he knew likewise that she attributed his altered demeanour to some attachment. Through the medium of Flounce he had likewise learned that she had once been overheard in soliloquy to exclaim—"Well, who can be the lady that has at length won the hitherto impenetrable heart of Sir Robert Leslie?" He had been used to calculate greatly upon the vanity of the sex, as indeed it *is* the greatest assistant that men can possibly engage in their designs upon woman, whether honourable or dishonourable, and he hoped, could he find a really favourable-purposely-contrived-accidental opportunity, (it was thus he expressed it himself,) not of disclosing, but of permitting the discovery of his passion, that the idea of being the only person who had the power to touch his "hitherto impenetrable heart" might operate greatly in his favour.

One morning, as usual, Leslie was sitting in his library revolving all these thoughts in his mind, and considering what should be his next step, when, contrary to his orders of not being at home, his servant announced that Mr. Hartley was in the drawing-room; a half-muttered curse at the stupidity of the domestic who had disobeyed his orders rose to his lips; for there was a kind of straightforwardness in the conversation, actions, and looks of Hartley, that frequently posed Leslie more than the most consummate art ever could have done.

He had also thought once or twice, that he had caught his eye fixed upon him with a very peculiar expression, and the

sense which he had that his real character could not be concealed from one who knew him so well as Hartley, produced a conscious feeling which was any thing but agreeable.

Under such circumstances a visit from Hartley was what he neither wished nor expected; and again he cursed his servant for admitting him.

Hartley was at this moment ushered into the library, and met by Leslie with that frank cordiality of aspect, that open welcoming countenance and hearty shake of the hand, that could never have conveyed an idea of what was passing in his mind with regard to his present visit.

"I am come, Sir Robert———"

"Sir Robert! Why, cousin Hartley," interrupted Leslie, "what means this formality?"

"Well then," cousin Leslie, "I am come to request a few moments' serious conversation with you, and am very happy to find one, whose qualifications are so attractive, and whose position in the world of fashion generally surrounds him with society, for once alone."

"Oh, my dear Hartley," said Leslie, with one of those modest airs he knew so well how to assume, "my qualifications are of little use in serious conversation: I move merely as the painted butterfly, whose outward colours induce many to pursue it, little thinking that the moment of success too frequently destroys the beauty which attracts their attention."

"Were this, Leslie," and Hartley assumed a serious, almost a grave air, "were this an applicable simile, my present visit would be happily rendered unnecessary; but there are insects which flutter in the sunbeams as brilliantly as the butterfly, but which conceal a sting beneath their beauties to punish those who may attempt their captivity!"

"And to pursue your metaphor, my dear Hartley," said Leslie, "do you not think it poetical, nay, moral justice, that this insect should use all the power that nature has bestowed upon him to punish those whose hands are unplifted to enslave it?"

"As applicable to those who may have such a wish, your answer may be correct," replied Hartley; "but when he flies out of his brilliant career to wound objects who never engendered an idea of his captivity, 'tis then he becomes dangerous, and that all hands are uplifted to crush him. But to have done with allegory—"

"Oh, with all my heart," laughed Leslie; "for since the

only use you have made of it has been to metamorphose me from a harmless butterfly into a malignant hornet, I know not what I may become at last; so in pity to the weakness of my understanding, be plain."

"It is not in my nature to be otherwise," said Hartley; "I know my own deficiencies as well as those who sneer at me. Society has not yet polished off the asperities of my nature sufficiently to enable me to clothe my questions in language which will either blunt their point or conceal their truth. To be plain, then, Sir Robert, ————;" and he hesitated; the awkwardness of the task he had undertaken —the character of the man he was addressing—the misconstruction his wilfulness might put upon the step he was taking —and the little real right he had to take it—all struck him at once, and he hesitatingly repeated—"to be plain," and was silent.

Leslie knew what was coming, saw his perplexity, and determining not to relieve it, took a pinch of snuff; then offering his box to Hartley, who declining it, he put it deliberately in his pocket, and fixing his large penetrating eyes full upon Hartley's countenance, waited patiently for the conclusion of his sentence.

Hartley still, however, remained silent; he knew perfectly what he wished to say, but feeling the tender ground he was upon with such a character as that of Leslie, he had not art enough to temporise, and was considering some way in which he might come plainly to the point without compromising anybody.

Nearly five minutes were thus passed in silent attention on the part of the one, and embarrassed thoughtfulness on that of the other.

"Well, Hartley," at length said Leslie, very quietly, and in one of his calm tones, "I am waiting for the conclusion of your sentence, which seems like the notes of Baron Munchausen's horn, to have been frozen in its passage."

"Sir Robert," said Hartley, still hesitating—almost stammering in his speech; "I wish to speak seriously with you upon a subject connected with a lady well known, and I trust well esteemed by both of us."

"Seriously upon the subject of a lady: my dear Hartley, is anything serious compatible with woman?" asked Leslie.

"Nay, Sir Robert, this is trifling,"—said Hartley.

"Well," interrupted Leslie, "and were you not talking of

women? But put your heart at rest; I presume that I may, of late, have danced too often with Lady Emily Trevor, and you dread having another rival in the field, and therefore take the privilege of a cousin to question me."

"Sir Robert, Sir Robert, you mistake me, I fear, wilfully mistake me," said Hartley with energy; "that I love Lady Emily Trevor ardently and sincerely, is known to the whole world; that I pursue her amidst a host of rivals, each of whom possesses a thousand more attractions than I do, is also known. I, with my plain manners, may have done unwisely to have entered the lists of competitorship for such a prize. But my heart for once has got the better of my head, and I have pursued its dictates. If I succeed, I become the happiest of men; if I fail, I must pass my whole life in attempting to forget her."

The energy with which Hartley had uttered this sentence quite astonished Leslie; who again refreshing his nose from his diamond box, asked whether he could be of any service to his cousin; and then hinted that a whole life was never necessary to forget any woman. Hartley, unused to give way to his feelings, had been betrayed unawares into this *exposé* of his sentiments, by the unexpected turn that Leslie had given to his meaning. Passing his hand, therefore, across his brow, as though he could brush away the expression which he was conscious it exhibited, he abruptly interrupted Leslie, by saying, "But it is not of Lady Emily Trevor that I came to speak—it is of"——and again he hesitated.—

"Of whom then? for really," said Leslie, "I had no idea that you were interested about any other than Lady Emily."

"No, no; it is not of Lady Emily, but of—Mrs. Trevor, that I wished to speak."

"Of Mrs. Trevor?" asked Leslie, in a voice whose calmness might almost be construed into carelessness; "and what of her, my dear Hartley?" Finding him silent, yet feeling that his eyes were fixed earnestly upon his face, he pursued in the same calm tone, and with the same unchanged countenance—"And what can you have to say of her?"

Hartley, as he contemplated the quiet, unmoved manner and countenance of Leslie, was almost staggered in his purpose; and it was not till he called to his mind his full knowledge of the consummate power which Leslie possessed over all his faculties, that he could still imagine the suspicions on

tertained by himself and Lady Emily to be founded in any thing like reality. He resumed—

Yes, Sir Robert, of Mrs. Trevor I would speak; and, as a man of honour, it must be in the strictest confidence between us."

Leslie bowed assent.

"Leslie," pursued Hartley, "accomplished as she is, with a mind more highly cultivated, talents more developed than in the rest of her sex, Mrs. Trevor is an inexperienced woman in the ways of the world; guided by her own feelings, and conscious of her own rectitude, she is careless of the opinions of society, so long as she knows she acts rightly; but you and I know, that this is not sufficient. The appearance, as well as the reality, is necessary; and no man by his perpetual attentions to a married woman should give the world a supposition of that which does not exist."

"Agreed, my dear Hartley, quite agreed," observed Leslie.

"It is more particularly the duty of one who is the friend of the husband to avoid this," pursued Hartley; "because that very friendship affords him greater opportunity for the display of those attentions which may be misconstrued by a censorious world."

"Agreed again—quite agreed," calmly observed Leslie. "And is any friend of Trevor's doing this?"

"Yes, Leslie, you know there is. You know that *you* yourself are acting thus; and Lady Emily, as the early and attached friend of Mrs. Trevor, trembles for the consequences."

"You surprise me, Hartley," said Leslie, with the same imperturbable manner. "You surprise me exceedingly;" taking a pinch of snuff. "But pray are you deputed by Trevor to come to me? or in what capacity am I to imagine that you catechise me thus?"

"I come, Leslie," said Hartley, "merely from the dictates of my own heart, and out of respect to the anxiety of one whom I reverence and love more than all the rest of the world. I come out of a sincere friendship to one of the most amiable of her sex, and out of pity to him who knows not how to appreciate her, but whom I may one day have to call my brother; and as such, I cannot be insensible to anything that can threaten a stain upon his honour, even in the thoughts of the giddy multitude."

"Well, Hartley, I listen to you with patience, and am quite willing to listen till you have concluded your sermon;

though, by the vehemence with which you proceed, I much fear that it may end with any thing rather than the usual termination of a benediction," replied Leslie.

"Nay, nay, Leslie," exclaimed Hartley, "you cannot misunderstand me; you cannot but be sensible that attentions from such a man as you are to a neglected wife, must have a pernicious influence on her reputation. And I know you so well, that without any hope of ultimate success, you are not satisfied without the attempt to inspire a feeling which, in a susceptible mind, may render a woman miserable for ever."

"Pray, Hartley," asked Leslie, "is this conduct dictated by fears for me, or fears for the lady? because if the latter, I should say it was any thing but complimentary to her principles and reputation."

"God forbid that I should breathe a word that could be construed as derogatory to either. No, Leslie," exclaimed Hartley, "I have no fears of that nature. Her heart is the seat of honour and of virtue. Her principles such, that had your fascination a mental force equal to the mechanical powers of Archimedes, you could not subvert them. But you might make her—" he again hesitated. He was afraid, to such a man as Leslie, to state the fears that agitated the mind of Lady Emily, who might be supposed the confidant of her friend, and was again silent.

"Now, my dear Hartley," said Leslie, "to what good can all this tend? Trevor is my friend. Is it unnatural that his wife should be so likewise? Whatever attentions I pay in that quarter are sanctioned by him; and what can you possibly have to do with it? And I should have thought by this time, you must have known that you might as well attempt to overturn the Newtonian system, as change either my principles or practice with regard to women."

"Then," indignantly exclaimed Hartley, "are all the elegancies of your wit, the brilliancy of your talents, and the accomplishments of your mind, perverted from the use for which they have been bestowed by a too-bountiful nature, all devoted entirely to self; and for the unsatisfactory gratification of a selfish vanity, you can risk the destruction of the happiness of a benevolent and amiable being."

"By being selfish, my dear cousin, I only imitate the rest of mankind; and Rochefoucault was right in inculcating the idea, that there is not one feeling in human nature that has not its foundation in the same principle."

"Hold, Sir Robert," said Hartley, "measure not mankind by the sentiments of your own heart. There is a spark of human nature which gives it some claim to affinity with superior beings."—At this moment he was interrupted by the entrance of Trevor. He stopped suddenly—surprised—confused, and unable to recover himself. Trevor could not but remark that his presence was unexpected, if not unwelcome.

"Eh, Hartley! Leslie! I hope I don't interrupt business? If I am *de trop*, say so, and I am off directly," said Trevor, looking inquiringly at both.

"Oh! no—no—no—not at all," stammered Hartley.

Leslie, who was really glad of the interruption, yet did not at all show it, coolly said to Hartley—"Well, cousin Hartley, shall we continue the discussion? or shall we defer it? Trevor is my friend, you know; and his presence, and opinions, may not be unserviceable on such an occasion."

"Oh! pray make any use of me you please," exclaimed Trevor. "Opinion—advice—any thing I have, is at the service of my friends, at all times, in all places, and in all circumstances."

Hartley was in an agony; he felt the dangerous position in which he had placed Agnes; he knew the daring recklessness and biting sarcasm of which Leslie was capable, and he trembled for the mischief that might result from his well-intentioned visit. Unable, however, to recover himself with the tact and coolness exhibited by Leslie, he stammered out —"Oh! no—no—no—not now—another time;" and was going, when Leslie, as though a thought had that moment struck him, stopped him.

"Hold, cousin Hartley," said he, and he spoke with a tone of solemnity; "it must be *now*, or it must be *never*. There can be no person so proper as my friend Trevor, to be present at a discussion in which a part of his family is involved; and if you refuse this, let my proposition convince you of the contrary to what you have supposed. I have treated the subject with lightness till now, because I thought you ought not to have entertained such suspicions seriously; but I cannot permit you to part from me with the impression unremoved."

This was said with such an air of candour, and uttered in such an impressive and serious tone, that Hartley was stag-

gered. He looked steadfastly in Leslie's face, and could read nothing but sincerity.

"Are you serious?" asked he, in a doubting voice.

"Prove me, Hartley," said Leslie, "I shrink not from it. If you have deduced from my manner a different conclusion, attribute it to the usual careless levity of my character, and that obstinacy of our nature which refuses even the truth when it is demanded a little too imperiously. Shall we resume the subject?"

"No, no," again hastily exclaimed Hartley, "I am"—and he hesitated—"I am satisfied."

He shook hands with Leslie; told Trevor he should see him at dinner; and hurried away.

"Eh! why Leslie, what the devil is the matter with Hartley?" asked Trevor, "Family matters! Oh, I see how it is; he has been jealous of Emily—thinks you have been paying her too much attention—fears you'll cut him out. Poor devil! I pity him the life she leads him; though I believe she will have him at last."

Leslie smiled at the ease with which Trevor had received the impression which he had intended to convey to him, when he said it was a discussion in which a part of his family was involved. But his smile was his only assent to the question: he never *uttered* a lie unnecessarily. He knew that, under any circumstances, Hartley could never rectify the mistake. He was happy in having relieved him from suspicions that might probably have interfered with his pursuit of Agnes, so closely as she was united by the ties of friendship with Lady Emily; and he finished his toilet with the utmost *nonchalance*, and drew Trevor into the Park for the purpose of meeting his wife.

## CHAPTER IX.

### PASSION.

By Heaven I'll tell her boldly that 'tis she.
Why should she ashamed or angry be,
To be beloved by me?

COWLEY.

### LESLIE TO VILLARS.

WHY, Villars, do you still pester me with your stories and your fears about the "Lady of the Lake," and her following me through the world? Is not Italy large enough for her to ramble in? Or if she is tired of that, is not the Lago Maggiore deep enough to make her forget me, or any thing else not worth remembering? Has she not wherewithal to indulge the most wayward of her wishes? Has not the letter from Lumley, giving her an account of my decease, satisfied her? Does she not suppose me dead and buried in one of the Ionian islands? and what would she have more? If her love continue so great as you describe it, why let her go and amuse herself by erecting a mausoleum to my memory. I should like to read the epitaph with which she would adorn it.

But you tell me that the old priest from being the humble supplicant—the meek and bare-headed friar—the receiver and distributer of alms, is become the sturdy threatener—the bold demander of justice—the brave defender and asserter of innocence. The hypocrite! But they are all alike—priests and women—all hypocrisy. This must have been the work of that cursed anonymous scribbler, who did all the mischief. Luckily for us, even HE did not know our real names; otherwise, this meddling priest might have given me trouble. You say he doubts my death: I therefore send you out a magazine, in the obituary of which I have inserted the death of an English gentleman, of my assumed name, on his travels, as

having concurred in the precise spot where Lumley chose to make me depart this life in such an exemplary and repentant manner. Weak people often believe that which they see in print, of which they can never be convinced in manuscript, or by mere word of mouth. The devil (the printer's devil, I mean) seems to give it the stamp of truth ; and this, I have no doubt, has been the real reason why all the lies of history and tradition have been received as gospel.

Once convinced I am no more, his Christianity will step in to our assistance ; his religion will never suffer him to make war with the dead. He will preach peace and forgiveness, along with the penitence he prescribes to his *protégée ;* and we shall jog on, in our old path, without any fear of future molestation. Yet, Fred, keep your eye upon them. I would not have them here for the world. So pray try to blot out such insignificant spots as the British isles from the map of their geographical knowledge. And so much for them.

And now, Fred, to the subject that engrosses my whole soul—that usurps such universal dominion over every sense of which I am possessed, that I cannot call one of them my own. No, they are all—all hers. Nay, she seems, by the influence of the passion she has inspired, to have created new ones. Yes, Fred, I am sure that in the fruition of such a love as mine for Agnes, a thousand new senses must start into existence to allow the full enjoyment of possession. All the feelings inspired by all the other women I have ever known in the world, if they could be congregated and amalgamated into one great passion, could not equal that which is now burning in my heart—yes, burning, Fred—literally, like Polyphemus for Galatea—

I burn for her with unrelenting fire.

Mine is indeed a giant love ; and I wish I had the power to roll down some huge rock upon the head of that Acis of a Trevor when I see him near its object.

If I did not thus suffer my passion to ebullitionize at night in these letters to you, in which the volcano of my heart and mind relieves itself, it would scorch me to a cinder ; and the only thing La Tour would have to do at my toilet in the morning, would be to sweep away his master.

All that I have felt before seems only to have been the feeling of a boy. Upon the principle of gymnastics, my

heart appears only to have attained strength by exercise, and its foregone experience only serves to make its present faculty of feeling the stronger.

As the Rhone is said to pass through the Lake of Geneva, and to issue out of its clear and crystal waters without leaving a trace of its own darker hue; so hither has passion after passion rolled through this heart of mine, and left it untouched by their fires. But this, Fred, this passion—this madness—this—call it what you please—for love is too cold a word, that occupies me now—is not, I fear, to be quenched, even by possession. Possession! my thoughts must not wander that way; and yet this dolt of a husband, this miserable, this insensible tool and fool, who prefers a gaming-table and the rattle of dice to the society and conversation of such a woman; and who deserts that bed, which her beauty so bravely becomes as it lies pillowed to receive him, for the purchased caresses of a foreign paramour; does everything in his power to throw her into my arms; and my web is silently, and I trust surely, weaving around him. Yes, he will be in my toils; and she must—she shall follow. Yes, Fred, *shall;* and when I say *shall* and *will*, I mean *volition*, and not the mere future tense; and you know I have never said it in vain.

Yet how or in what way to accomplish this will, I can see no present means; though this plotting head of mine absolutely aches with the schemes that it daily, nightly, and hourly suggests, with this sole object in view. The treadmill itself does not revolve more times in the course of the four-and-twenty hours than this brain of mine in the consideration of the various projects and plans which present themselves. The ruin of her husband does not afford means quick enough for my impatience. The dice are not *always* against him; and thus it is a longer operation than I had calculated upon, and in the mean time my passion is preying upon my very soul—is wearing me out inch by inch; and it becomes a matter of absolute justice to myself to succeed. Self-preservation, everybody says, is the first law of nature; and nobody can blame me for acting upon that which actuates everybody. Yes, the posession of Agnes Trevor is absolutely necessary to my existence; and it would indeed be a kind of moral suicide, not to attempt everything to compass my ends: and suicide, you know, is the worst of crimes; isn't it, Fred?

You say, give her up; come to Italy, and lose all recollection

of such a coy beauty, in the arms of the many willing ones who will welcome me there. Fred, I cannot do it. Nor could the possession of all the women in Italy, provided you could ensure me such wholesale merchandise, quench the *soif de jouissance* which she has inspired. Yet what to do, I know not. To gain her by consent seems to be a work of ages. She will never yield till her gray heirs have rendered *her* unlovely, and my own have made *me* impotent—neither of them desirable circumstances, under any event: for I have known two elderly people, whose passions are dead, to compare former feelings over conversational souchong; and regret that they did not understand each other when their passions were alive, and when the understanding would not have been entirely useless. Think of this, Fred, and let us save ourselves and others from this useless repentance.

But am I to be foiled—foiled by a girl? I, who have triumphed over twenty—I believe I may add ten to the number, but I have not my common-place book by me, and I don't like to commit myself: yet one cannot call that conquest either, where willingness met us in the middle of the way, and saved us the trouble of going over the other half. To conquer such a woman as this, is indeed conquest—at least it shall be. But how to make it so, that is the question; whether gentleness will win her to my purpose, or whether, Tarquin-like, I shall make her mine by force; and win her will and heart afterwards, eh, Fred? shall her attendants—

> ——————some morning early,
> Find the bed unhearsed of her mistress?

What say you to this? Shall I venture? What though I failed, and died in the attempt, I should be found like the miser in the ruins of Herculaneum, scorched to death with my treasure in my hand. Yet no, I would not owe her to force; that is, provided I can win her otherwise; I must have her mind—her heart—her will—her *soul*. But you say, that with a woman so constituted, forbidden joys would produce agony instead of delight; that the anxiety, the guilt, the terror, would turn pleasure into pain. Fred, you don't know human nature so well as old Ovid, that venerable patriatch of love's literature, who, speaking of what are called guilty joys, says,

> The guilt which makes them anxious, makes them GREAT.

And is not this true? and have not we found it so?—to be sure we have; and shall again, I trust.

By my soul, Fred, when I think of it, women are very ill treated in these conventional laws which society has chosen to impose upon them. Here we rove about, and may have as many mistresses as there are months, aye, or as there are weeks in the year, if we please, while a poor woman is tied to one dull stick of a husband for the whole of her life. Upon my word, it is too bad; and such spirited fellows as you and I are, Fred, who see this injustice, and take pity upon them, ought to have a statue in bronze erected to us, at the expense of the whole sex.

Why cannot women do as men do?—

> Let every woman choose the man she likes,
> To pleasure her, and after him another;
> Changing as often as the subtle wind,
> The pale-faced moon, or their own wandering thoughts.

Clever, sensible gentlemen, those same Messieurs Beaumont and Fletcher, who frequently say more to the purpose in a single line, than a modern poet does in a whole canto.

What a vast deal of trouble would this save; particularly to the poor women; and then, that one might not quarrel about paternity, I would have the children all educated at the expense of the public, like those of the Spartans. Oh! I am quite sure, Fred, that a great lawgiver and statute-maker was spoiled, when I was made only a simple baronet: for I have at this moment a *code moral* in my head, that would set mankind, aye, and womankind too, completely to rights, and only ruin Doctors' Commons.—A knock at this time of night——

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To resume:—I had scarcely written the word Doctors' Commons, when in came Trevor, in his way from his club. I don't know how it is, but my heart always rises, and a kind of something like suffocation oppresses me at the sight of him; and yet, poor devil, he helps me as much as he can. But what do you think he came for?—why, to tell me they were making arrangements for passing the summer at Trevor Hall, and that I was included in the party proposed to be invited. What think you of that, Fred? To be domesticated in the same house with her; to sleep under the same roof

with her; to have her constantly before my eyes; the companion of my walks and rides; her conversation in the morning, her harp in the evening; and then the opportunities that must occur, and if they don't occur naturally, that I shall make—. By heavens, this will seal our fate,—this will make her mine. Well, to use Buonaparte's favourite phrase, "Que les destins s'accomplissent!"

Hers is just the soul to be worked on in the country; she is alive to the beauties of nature; groves of nightingales and purling streams will soften her heart; and I, Fred, Proteus-like, will become a perfect sylvan swain, and be an enthusiastic admirer of green trees, blue skies, daisied meadows, and all the et-ceteras of Arcadian scenery. Who knows but through the medium of her own forests I may make her the declaration that I find it so impossible to make here? Perhaps—

> Her beaming eyes in wandering may mark
> The twisted cipher of her much-lov'd name
> Wholesomely going through a course of BARK.

For I am madly in love enough to do any foolish thing that the most foolish lovers are said to do—and all lovers are madmen or fools—are they not, Fred?

The idea of this visit has given a buoyancy to my spirits—a happiness to my heart, that augurs well. I could not have imagined any thing more likely to be conducive to my success; and I am so well satisfied with myself as well as with every thing about me, that, with the man in Ben Jonson's comedy, I could exclaim—

> I do not wish myself to be a bit taller, a bit shorter,
> A bit stouter, a bit thinner, than I am
> At this very moment.

Thanks to Trevor and his hospitality! I shall certainly accept his invitation—would n't you Fred?

Besides, La Tour—that subtle devil, has made himself so completely the master of the *femme-de-chambre's* heart; and, if appearances are not deceitful, of her person too, (La Tour is a sad dog among the women, and I must correct him,) that she will do any thing for me. Oh these women!—"of every ten that are made, the devils mar five;"—and who knows, Fred—in the same house, with the maid in one's favour,—who knows what may happen? or rather, what may not hap

pen? Dressing-rooms have closets; bed-rooms back staircases. Mem.—to make myself perfectly acquainted with the whole topography of the house—from the attics to the basement—from the housemaid's room to the *dormitorio* of the lovely mistress. I have known a great deal done and a great deal escaped by a thorough knowledge of the *ways* of a large house—have not you, Fred?

I am told, too, that Trevor Hall is one of those old-fashioned places built in the days of our good Harry the Eighth (our worthy prototype, with regard to women, Fred); when Hans Holbein decorated the walls, and the architect only considered in his plan how he should form an ingenious labyrinth. These, Fred, are the very houses for intrigue, with their bay-windows, and numberless nooks and corners, and hiding-places, and listening-places, and loop-holes. Houses such as that in which Gray says the Huntingdons and Hattons employed

> ——————the power of fairy hands
> To raise the ceiling's fretted height;
> Each pannel in achievement clothing;
> Rich windows that exclude the light,
> And passages that lead to nothing.

I think, though, that you and I, upon occasion, have found them lead to something—hav n't we Fred? And I trust those of Trevor Hall will lead to something worth remembering, and worth telling, too.

But to my visit. Lady Flora Freeling, the young wife of the old financier, is to be of the party; she is Trevor's passion for the moment, and I have little doubt her consenting to be one of us is his principal reason for the arrangement. Luckily, too, the Argus-eyed friend of Agnes, Lady Emily Trevor, is obliged to attend her Lady mother into Yorkshire, where of course she will be followed by her substantial shadow, my cousin Hartley; so that I anticipate a clear field. We are to start in three days; my next letter, therefore, Fred, will, for the first time, be dated under the same roof with *her*—mind, whenever you find a feminine pronoun without any antecedent, that you always translate it—Agnes! I don't know whether there is any grammatical rule for this in Lindley Murray—but never mind.

Now is it not odd, Fred, that Trevor should prefer such a woman as Lady Flora, whom both you and I know very well

and never quarrelled in our opinions about her, to such a woman as I describe his wife to be? Can there be any truth in the idea that marriage really diminishes one's feelings, and lessens that beauty in a wife in the eyes of her husband, which he admired in her when he considered her only as a mistress, because she is a wife? or is the Italian proverb true, that—

Al molino, ed alla *sposa*,
Sempre manca qualche cosa?

Well, Fred, if it be so, this *qualche cosa* has been a good friend to you and I upon more occasions than one—and so Good night!

London was now beginning to thin; parliament had been prorogued; the closed window-shutters of different houses were beginning to proclaim the absence of their tenants; and Agnes longed to escape from the dissipation and oppressive heat of London, once more to breathe the free, clear, and open air of the country.

As the thought of Trevor Hall came upon her mind, a gentle sigh escaped her; but she had long, long since discarded the idea that the country was to recall those scenes which rendered the first months of her marriage so happy. She had long since ceased to hope it; and, almost unconsciously to herself, had unfortunately ceased to wish it. This latter feeling had created some little surprise in her own mind; but it was very easily attributable to the conduct of Trevor, and to the total difference of his character from any thing she had ever anticipated.

A party was soon made up among the few people who remained in Town; and others agreed to come at stated periods during their stay at the Hall. Lady Flora, Leslie, and D'Oyley, were among those proposed by Trevor, and assented to by Agnes, who felt great pleasure in Leslie's being included in her husband's invitation, as his apparent friendship as well as his talents had made him to her a very desirable addition to her party.

The arrangements were therefore soon made; the London establishment was put upon board wages; the imperials were crammed; the carriages filled; and away flew the Trevor family and their party, to carry London into the country.

Leslie, to the great joy of Flounce, and to the pretended

delight of La Tour, followed a few days after, and arrived just as the family were comfortably established at that place. in which alone Agnes had ever tasted the delights of married happiness.

## CHAPTER X

### THE PORTRAIT.

ARCH. I must admire any thing, madam, that has the least resemblance of you. Pray, madam, who drew it?

MRS. SUL. A famous hand, sir.

ARCH. A famous hand, madam! Your eyes indeed are featured here; but where 's the sparkling moisture, the shining fluid in which they swim? The picture, indeed, has your dimples; but where 's the swarm of killing Cupids that should ambush there? The lips, too, are figured out; but where 's the carnation dew, the pouting ripeness, that tempts the taste in the original?

MRS. SUL. (*aside.*) Oh, had it been my lot to have matched with such a man!

FARQUHAR.

It was in the country that Leslie was destined to feel the full force of that attraction which was becoming his destiny. In the midst of London dissipation, Agnes had never appeared half so charming, half so fascinating as now, that, untrammeled by the fetters of fashionable society, she gave way to her natural disposition. Welcomed and beloved by her tenantry, she seemed the guardian angel, the tutelar genius of the neighbourhood, and devoted her mornings to inquire into and remedy the evils which had arisen from their long absence.

The large party at Trevor Hall being literally either purposely on the part of Trevor, or accidentally on the part of Agnes so selected, that they were divided into pairs, and Trevor devoting himself almost exclusively to Lady Flora Freeling, Agnes was left during the mornings almost entirely to Leslie.

He rode with her—he walked with her—he encountered her in her morning visits of charity, apparently engaged in the same object. He met her in her evening stroll on the

terrace, from which it was one of her great delights to watch the sun sink into the distant bosom of the Atlantic; and he hung enchanted over her at the harp, descanting with enthusiasm on the sweet sounds that seemed to engross his whole soul.

Admiring the same beauties, engaged in the same pursuits, no wonder that ideas of the congeniality of their minds and dispositions sprang up in the breast of Agnes; and with it came also a feeling of regret, of almost sympathy, that one who seemed so every way capable of bestowing happiness, should not have met with some woman whose heart and mind might have corresponded with the warm and enthusiastic feelings by which his own appeared to be directed. Then her thoughts would glance for a moment at Trevor—would draw an involuntary comparison, and an involuntary sigh would escape her. But thoughts like these she felt to be dangerous, and with a strong resolution she threw them from her.

Sometimes, as they rode or walked together, engaged either in conversation or charitable pursuits, she would wonder at the early impressions she should have imbibed of this man, and could scarcely believe that the Leslie she now saw, and he whom she recollected to have heard and judged of through the medium of the paragraphs which recorded his crime, was the same person.

Leslie exerted all his powers of conversation to render their *tête-à-têtes* as long and as delightful as possible: with his observations on the scenery and circumstances around him, he would mingle tales of romantic adventure—anecdotes of daring gallantry—and sometimes venture upon a story of enthusiastic passion, that would call the colour into the cheek of Agnes, and dim her eye with the tear of sympathy and admiration. To lead her thoughts to himself, he would then become apparently abstracted; a sigh would escape from his bosom, a cloud come over his brow; recollections and regrets would appear to oppress him almost to agony; the moment that he perceived this change had fixed her attention, he would strike the rowels into the sides of his horse, and starting from her side in a furious gallop, appear determined to outride recollection and regret, and then return to her in a few minutes with a forced gayety that only added strength to the impression made by his previous apparently deep feeling.

He knew that in such a heart as that of Agnes all this must in time make its way. He felt her increasing interest in his fate; and with that tact which is never deceived, where it exists, he fully understood that these interviews, so delightful to him from one cause, and yet so tantalizing from another, were any thing but uninteresting to her, and he blessed the happy constitution of the party at Trevor House for leaving her so much to himself.

Patient as he had compelled himself to be, he began to tire of the passive part he was compelled to play—a part so unlike that dictated by his hitherto enterprising disposition; yet for the life of him he dared not proceed. The fact was, in no other instance had his heart been engaged in the pursuit; in no other woman had he found such admirable qualities so blended, that while one excited his passion to the utmost, another kept him within the bounds of respect. Yet, could he have been sure, or could he even have hoped that he had excited one incipient reciprocal feeling to plead for him in her breast, he had long ere this have ventured all, and have declared himself.

But of this there was no appearance; warm as were her feelings, glowing with all the animation of youth, and disappointed as they had been, where they ought to have been gratified, they exercised themselves in charity and not in love. Yet her heart was such, that he was convinced it was not framed to remain insensible; he felt certain that the indifference to which Trevor's conduct had reduced her must, at some period or other, be succeeded by another passion; he could not believe that such a heart could remain long unoccupied. In the meantime, he was certainly more in the thoughts of Agnes than he supposed, though without exciting one of the feelings that he wished.

She was, as he had calculated, grateful for his conduct with regard to Trevor, and she felt a pleasure in the sympathy which she had excited in a mind evidently so superior to the generality of those by whom she was surrounded. She saw, too, that this man loved, and she believed him to be unhappy; and her curiosity being excited as to the object of his attachment, together with the evident anxiety of his mind, kept him almost a perpetual inmate of her thoughts.

As she became the more perplexed, the more restless became her curiosity to discover his secret; and during the execution of that part of his scheme by which he expected

to rouse some feeling of jealousy, she had fixed upon two or three who seemed to be the likely fair ones; but still she could not decide.

These thoughts had intruded themselves with more force than usual one morning during a ride in which she had been accompanied by some of her party without Leslie, to pay visits at a distance, and she was still canvassing his conduct with regard to various females with whom she had formerly seen him, when her carriage arrived at her own door. On alighting, instead of going to the drawing-room, she passed into the library, but stopped suddenly as she observed Sir Robert Leslie absorbed in the contemplation of a miniature which lay before him on the table. His head rested on his hands; his eye seemed fixed intently on the object before him; and so intensely did he appear to be occupied by his contemplation of the portrait, that her entrance had not disturbed him.

Her first motion was to withdraw; but her curiosity, and the secret hope at length of its being gratified, detained her. A deep sigh escaped from Leslie. Emotions which he appeared struggling to repress seemed to overpower him. He started, and wiped the portrait with his handkerchief as though a tear had dropped upon it. He pressed it to his lips and heart; then gazed upon it again and again; and laying it on the table, concealed his face with his hands, and resting his forehead upon the miniature, sobbed almost convulsively.

Agnes watched him in breathless silence; she felt unable either to retreat or to advance; the contemplation of so much feeling where she had been so often led to suppose there was none; the sighs which now rapidly succeeded each other as he gave way to the sensations which seemed to be overpowering him; altogether created in her own bosom an emotion which kept her silent and impeded her utterance. Her heart beat quickly: a tear of sympathy for sufferings which she attributed to unrequited love, sufferings, the acuteness of which her own recollection taught her, and which none can feel like woman, trembled in her eye. Yet, sensible of the impropriety of intruding thus upon his secret sorrows, she wished to gain the door unobserved, and to leave him ignorant that there had been any witness to such unequivocal demonstrations of an unhappy attachment.

But she was too late; her first movement struck upon the

ear of Leslie; he started, gazed for an instant wildly upon Agnes, then seizing the miniature, closed it hastily, and grasping it with an energy which seemed to say, "None shall take my only treasure from me," held it against his breast. Neither of them could speak for a moment. He gazed at her with an intensely inquiring eye, as though he would ascertain if she had penetrated his secret; and she was too confused by the nature of the scene she had contemplated, and the suddenness of the discovery, to utter a syllable.

At length recovering herself, she repressed the expression of sympathy which was her first impulse; she attempted to address him with an air of badinage, and approaching him—"So, so, Sir Robert Leslie, I find the world does indeed belie your heart when it has designated it as insensible."

"Mrs. Trevor—madam—I beseech," stammered out Leslie.

"Nay, nay, Sir Robert; but may I not know—may not the friendship which exists between us—I mean between you and Mr. Trevor, give me a privilege, where I perceive you are far from happy?"

"Oh! no, no, no!" exclaimed Leslie, energetically.

"May I not ask? Perhaps I might be of service—"

"Of service!—you! you!—oh, no, no, no!" and a sigh burst from his bosom, so deep, that Agnes almost imagined that his heart would have broken with its utterance. She was affected, deeply affected; her words no longer flowed freely—they faltered on her lips—she became silent and confused—he gazed at her for a moment—clasped his hands wildly together—appeared on the point of speaking, and rushed precipitately out of the library, leaving Agnes astonished at the extent of his agitation and alarmed at her own emotions.

For a moment after his departure she remained silent. How wrongly has this man, thought she, been estimated by that world which has pronounced him as unfeeling! How wrong to imagine him cold-hearted! Where there is so much genuine feeling united with so much talent, there must be virtue. Such were the reflections which passed through her mind when Flounce came running into the library, and exclaimed, "Bless me, ma'am, what can be the matter with Sir Robert Leslie?"

So simple a question, but so accordant with her present thoughts, startled Agnes.

"The matter with Sir Robert Leslie, girl? why, what should be the matter?"

"Oh, nothing, ma'am, only he nearly ran over me just now in the great avenue," said Flounce; "and in his haste and confusion, for he was confused, I assure you, ma'am, he dropped this." And Agnes again started, and felt the colour come in double tides to her cheeks as she saw the identical red morocco case in which she had so recently seen Leslie shut up the miniature he had been contemplating.

"And why did you not return it?"

"I called after him, ma'am; but he was out of sight in an instant; and I thought the best thing I could do, ma'am, was to bring it to you," said Flounce.

"I hope you hav n't had the imprudence to open it?" said her lady; "it would have been very wrong if you had."

"Oh dear no, ma'am—not for the world—I would not do such a thing for the world. It shuts with a spring I think, for I could not find out the way——I mean—that is—," and Flounce stammered—with a kind of half confession of an unsuccessful attempt.

"Go, give it to Sir Robert's servant."

"To Monsieur La Tour, ma'am?"

"Yes—yet stay"—then in a low voice—"he may not like to trust it to his care. I had better take it myself and deliver it, with the assurance that it has been unopened. Give it to me, and you need mention nothing to his servant of the circumstance."

"Oh, certainly not, ma'am—you may depend upon me, ma'am. Shall I lay out your last blonde dress for dinner today, ma'am, or will you have the silver tissue?"

"Any thing you please," said Agnes, as her eyes were fixed intently on the miniature case; and away tripped the *femme-de-chambre* to her avocations of the toilet.

Agnes contemplated the picture-case for some minutes in silence; she turned it round in her hand, and looked at both sides of it as though she expected to discover whose resemblance it contained from the outside.

The temptation to open it came strong upon her. Curiosity, our great mother's vice, became absolutely intense; yet still she resisted the inclination, though her eyes were riveted to the case. Argument after argument entered into

her mind as an excuse for the gratification of her desire to see the miniature; but the innate delicacy of her mind prevailed over her curiosity; and she was about placing it in some secure drawer until she saw Leslie to return it to him, when, at an accidental pressure upon the spring, the cover flew open, and the portrait was displayed to her astonished and almost unbelieving sight. She started—the blood rushed to her face, and then back again to her heart; she breathed almost convulsively, as she exclaimed, "Good God! what do I see? Can I believe my eyes? my own portrait!!!"

A sickness came over her heart; a dizziness spread itself over her sight; she sunk almost fainting into a chair, and her hand with the picture fell listlessly by her side. Still she did not let it drop.

A few seconds recovered her, and she again looked upon the portrait. It was indeed a striking resemblance, and must have been painted by one who had studied her features well As she knew Leslie painted, and could not imagine that he would venture to employ any artist in such a task, she attributed the portrait to his own hands; and a feeling of tenderness, accompanied by a sentiment of gratitude, not unmixed with pleasure, stole over her as she mentally confessed that his memory in absence must have been very faithful to have produced so striking a likeness. She resisted this feeling with all the remaining strength of her mind; for the sudden surprise had completely unnerved her. A thousand recollections now crowded upon her to convince her of what the portrait and his recent agitation too plainly told; a thousand circumstances were now accounted for which had hitherto appeared mysterious. Her mind became confused; tears started in her eyes; but seemed immediately scorched up by the intensity of her feelings. A dangerous contrast between such a proof of attachment and the neglect of Trevor occurred to her imagination; and it was in vain that she strove to banish the unwelcome comparison. The exclamation of "Oh! Trevor, why hast thou not loved like this?" burst from her lips; and she continued absorbed in the contemplation of the portrait, recalling the dangerous recollections of the sighs and tears that Leslie had breathed and shed over it—of the agitation he betrayed at her entrance—and the feeling amounting almost to agony that he seemed to endure when, with a convulsive effort, he repressed the

utterance of his secret, which she now plainly felt he had almost, and feared that he had quite betrayed.

As these thoughts and these recollections came over her, and convinced her of the necessity of resisting them, she also began to think how she should conduct herself with regard to the picture; to return it herself was impossible; to permit her maid to do it, was not only to run the risk of her discovering whose portrait it was, but it was tacitly permitting him to retain a resemblance of her, which decidedly ought not to be the case. To destroy it occurred to her mind; but then her maid might tell La Tour, and La Tour would undoubtedly tell his master of her having found it, and of the manner in which she disposed of it.

To prevent the restoration of the portrait to the hands of Leslie, and to keep him in ignorance of her knowledge of it, was the desideratum to be arrived at; but no scheme that she could contrive was likely to accomplish this.

Poor Agnes was utterly unused to plotting; her mind and disposition, as open as the day, never had yet had occasion for a subterfuge of any sort or kind. Yet here she felt the necessity for concealment; felt it for her own sake, and felt it for Leslie's; since it was from no fault, no presumption of his, but from mere unavoidable accident, that she had obtained a knowledge of his secret; and our first parents scarcely repented more of the acquisition of their knowledge through disobedience, than she did of that which she had obtained within the last quarter of an hour by the accidental gratification of her curiosity.

Her situation seemed surrounded with difficulties, and she was still contemplating the portrait, and still pondering on the best method of extricating herself from them, without either betraying Leslie or compromising herself, when she started horror-struck from the *fauteuil* on which she was sitting, on hearing the exclamation of—

"What a striking likeness! never saw such a resemblance in my life; a Chalons in point of style; a Stump in point of colouring; a Drummond in point of expression. Pray, Mrs. Trevor, let me examine it more closely; for if there is anything I do understand, it is painting." And before Mrs. Trevor could prevent him, D'Oyley had possessed himself of the miniature, and was criticising its merits through his glass.

"Quite a Lawrence in miniature, I declare—as perfect

an ivory as I ever beheld ; the mind glowing in the features. You must know, ma'am, expression in portrait-painting is everything ; as I said to Jackson the other day, when he was just touching up Lady Sarah's chin, attend to the expression ; for there is more mind in Lady Sarah's chin, than in the eyes, nose, and mouth of many other people : you know Lady Sarah's whole character lies in her chin ; and if there is anything I do understand, it is expression."

Mr. D'Oyley—Mr. D'Oyley!" exclaimed Agnes ; and she spoke in a tone which electrified the poor busy creature.

" Ma—a—a—m——?"

But she immediately felt the imprudence of giving way to her anger ; and therefore forcing a smile, she modulated her voice to a softer tone, and said—" Mr. D'Oyley, you frightened—I mean, surprised me."

" Really—did I—well really now. I am positively sorry, and positively beg pardon ; but the fact was, wanting to see Trevor to say many happy returns of to-day—his birthday—I thought he was in the library, and I came in unannounced. I always think an unexpected congratulation gives the most pleasure ; and if there is anything I do understand, it is giving pleasure."

How severely Agnes felt the contrary, it is needless to observe : she held her hand out for the portrait ; but D'Oyley still retained it.

" It is excellent, really excellent ; but it wants a touch here—one touch ; and the drapery, a little stiff ; this sleeve should have been a *gigot*, and this kerchief *couleur cerulean*. It would have assorted better with the character of the picture ; and if there is anything I do understand, it is character."

" Sir—sir—pray—pray—the portrait—somebody——" and she was going with her usual openness to betray her fears, when D'Oyley, returning the miniature, interrupted her.

" Ha ! I see how it is—see it all in a moment—Trevor's birth-day. The portrait a present—a pleasing surprise ! Well, if there is anything I do understand, it is guessing. Happy Trevor ! to have a wife who——" At this moment Trevor entered the library—she had still the portrait in her hand. " Ha, Trevor," continued the pertinacious D'Oyley, " you are arrived just in time—just in time to be the happiest fellow on earth ; such a likeness was never seen ! Her very self—nay, madam, for once let a poor forlorn bachelor

witness the pleasures of connubial attention, if he cannot enjoy them. Nay—nay—I must tell him."—Agnes had no power to interrupt him: her tongue seemed to cling to the roof of her mouth.—"I can't contain it—Trevor! Mrs. Trevor has the best likeness of herself—the most delightful miniature—as a present for you. Now—pray, madam, give it him. There—there it is; and now, I take my leave: for if there is anything I do understand, it is the proper time for every thing."

"A miniature!—a present for me?" said Trevor, as he took the portrait from her resistless and trembling hand. "A striking resemblance indeed, and I am grateful for it. But why—why this agitation?—why do you tremble? Ah! I know, Agnes, that you think, perhaps, that my late conduct has not deserved such an attention. But, believe me, my inattention is only apparent: the calls on my time—our station in society—the necessity for doing as other people do."

"Oh, Trevor!" exclaimed Agnes, with a faltering voice; and this little apologetic appeal was softening her heart towards him; and she was going to disclaim the picture, the present, and the reproach, when the difficulty of the explanation struck her again, speechless. She saw no way of making it with honour to herself, or safety to others; for to such a mind as that of Agnes, to have inspired an illicit love, even involuntarily, appeared a degradation, if not a crime. The recollection of what she imagined had been Leslie's long series of sufferings—the suddenness of the discovery—the circumstances attending it—had, in the first moment of surprise, seduced her heart to take a more lenient view of the event, than even the very short time which had elapsed would permit her to retain; and the sight of her husband—a word or two of returning tenderness, recalled to her all the criminality of the passion she had pitied; and her attempt at explanation, proved to her the predicament in which she was placed.

Trevor still attributed her agitation to the first cause to which he had ascribed it; and still attempted to soothe it by a continuance of the same defence with which he had commenced, when he was interrupted by the sudden entrance of Leslie; who, with a perturbed step and anxious countenance, almost rushed into the apartment.

Thunderstruck at the sight of Trevor with his arm round Agnes, who seemed ready to sink with agitation, and at see

ing the portrait in his hand, his first thoughts were, that a fit of indignation had induced her to give it to her husband, and explain to whom it belonged, and how it had come into her possession. He cursed in his heart the folly and caprice of women; and was bitterly repenting his experiment, when he was relieved by Trevor's presenting him the portrait, and demanding his opinion of its resemblance.

Astonished, and with all his *sang-froid* uncertain how to act, and whether Trevor spoke satirically, and with a full knowledge of the circumstances, he cast a rapid glance at Agnes. Her face was, however, hid upon her husband's shoulder. He could catch no instructions—no hint—for his reply; and he again inwardly and bitterly cursed the sex and its caprices.

Trevor, however, relieved him by asking—"Is it not an excellent likeness? You must not laugh at my little old-fashioned wife, Leslie. But this is my birth-day; and it being only the second since our marriage, she has planned this little surprise for me.—Is it not her very self?"

"It is, indeed, a most excellent likeness;" and again he cast his eyes towards Agnes. Trevor had now changed his position, and by approaching, had placed himself between Leslie and his wife.

Agnes' eyes were not this time turned from him. They followed her clasped hands, which were raised silently to heaven, as though attesting her innocence; while an almost impatient motion of her head negatived the idea that she had been at all accessary to the deceit.

"The artist has certainly done his best, and succeeded admirably," pursued Trevor. "Did you ever see a greater effect produced by any artist in the world?"

"Oh! an immense effect, certainly," rejoined Leslie, with another glance at Agnes, which was this time returned with indignation.

"Really, my love," continued Trevor, "you must patronise the fellow, he must be a genius; and then, he has kept your secret so well: who is he?—who is he, Agnes?"

"It is necessary, Trevor, that—that I should explain:" she hesitated.—"Sir Robert Leslie can inform you best." Her courage rose with the determination to act rightly; and the whole history of the portrait was evidently coming, when Leslie interrupted her with—"Yes, yes, Trevor; it is an artist of my recommendation; one under my patronage, and

I recommended him to Mrs. Trevor's attention, as one who would exert himself to the utmost to deserve her future favours.

An appealing look to Agnes, and her own fears of the too probable consequences of an *éclaircissement*, rendered her again silent; and made her, for the first time in her life, the tacit partner in a falsehood.

Leslie saw that he was safe; and feeling that his continued security depended upon the present absence of Trevor, he reminded him of some mutual engagements for the morning, and hurried him away; leaving Agnes a prey to the most mortifying reflections, and under the painful conviction that if she had not herself acted with duplicity, she had aided the deceit of another by a silence which her conscience condemned as criminal.

## CHAPTER XI.

### A WARNING.

Il sait calculer tout ce qu'un homme peut se permettre d'horreurs sans se compromettre; et pour être cruels et mechant sans danger, il a choisi les femmes pour victimes.

MORALES FRANÇAISES.

### LESLIE TO VILLARS.

'Tis done, Fred, 'tis done—she knows that I love her, and has nothing to blame but her own curiosity; that is certainly a prevalent vice with the sex. It drove Eve out of Paradise, and Fatima into the Blue Chamber. One, they say, lost her innocence by her inquisitive disposition, and the other her head. Well, women sometimes get on tolerably well without the one; but they can do nothing without the other, that 's certain. By the by, Fred, both the Devil and Blue Beard seem to have had a most consummate knowledge of the sex in attacking them on the side of curiosity: and the latter had certainly a most speedy

and efficient way of preventing it from being troublesome or interfering with his domestic arrangements. For my part, I always encourage this propensity in women—aye, and gratify it too—when it happens to require any little information it may be in my power to give; and I think in my time I have taught them something. But

On their own merits modest men are dumb;

and so I am silent.

Seriously, though, I do think that quite as many women have sinned out of curiosity, as from any other motive in the world; and while it leads to a result so beneficial to us, surely, Fred, we ought not to quarrel with the dear souls for having such inquiring minds.

It was nothing but curiosity now that gave Agnes the knowledge of my passion. I had instilled into her head that I loved somebody, and she could never be easy till she knew who it was—never once guessing it was herself. who could it be, while she was in the world, and near me? But how did you do it? How did it come about? methinks I hear you ask. Why then, Fred, to tell you the honest truth, I put my scheme of the portrait into execution—contrived to be discovered weeping and sighing over it—you know I can weep and sigh upon occasions—refused to tell whose resemblance it was—managed to drop it, and through the medium of Mrs. Flounce to place it in the hands of Agnes. Her curiosity did the rest, and discovered her own miniature, wet with my tears. Oh, Fred! I would have given worlds to have witnessed the first effect of the discovery—to have seen the colour that mantled in her cheek as she perused the lineaments of her own sweet face: then the succeeding paleness at the idea of being loved—as she knows and feels that I can love; for I have contrived to instil that idea into her mind. Perhaps, too, a starting tear—a fluttering about the heart—a slight sensation of suffocation, and a half-suppressed sigh, might have accompanied the *unexpected* discovery. Do you think she did sigh, Fred? Unexpected! and was it unexpected? Oh, yes! she is above all artifice; and therefore you will say, much more likely to be its victim. Do you really think so?—what a pity!

Well, Fred, the comedy was played to the life: I acted

the passionate and despairing lover, and Flounce the chambermaid to a miracle. But there was one actor in the scene who certainly was never included in the original *dramatis personæ* of my piece—and this was Trevor himself. How the devil he came there, I am even now at a loss to determine: but imagine, Fred, on my return, intending to act the anxious loser of my only treasure, and to perceive and make use of the effect of the discovery which had taken place; for I was not summoned by Flounce till she had ascertained that her mistress had actually opened the miniature: imagine, I say, my finding the portrait in the hands of Trevor himself, looking much more conjugal (curse the fellow!) than I have seen him look these last six months. At first I imagined, like Lady Teazle, she had told the truth; and that, like poor Joseph Surface, I should be bowed out for my morality, and cut off from my hopes for ever. But, no! she was too sensible a woman to make mischief; or perhaps too much afraid of the consequences of an *exposé*. Trevor's manner soon convinced me that all was safe. He thanked her for the portrait, as though it had been a present from her to him; thanked her in a voice of so much more tenderness than usual, that I could have cursed him. I believe I did indulge in a little mental imprecation. Could she have wilfully deceived him? I can scarcely think it. Her face was alternately pale and red—the heaving of her bosom displayed the agitation of her mind—her eye, half filled with tears, fell beneath my inquisitive glance. Trevor inquired who was the artist that had painted the picture. I suppose he wants a portrait of Lady Flora! Still she was silent—for how should she know, poor soul! and I suppose no miniature-painter presented his card to her remembrance at that moment; so to relieve her from the dilemma, I answered that it was a young artist whom I had recommended to the patronage of Mrs. Trevor, whose favours he was most anxious to receive and to deserve. That was well thrown in, Fred, was'nt it? considering that she no doubt thinks me the painter. Had you seen her look—her full eyes first fell on me with a glance of indignation—very ungrateful, considering the lie was intended for her benefit—they were then cast up to heaven, or rather to the ceiling; and her hands seemed to move involuntarily, in some silent appeal. I saw the truth was trembling on her lips, and ready to em-

body itself into utterance. It was then my turn to make a silent appeal to *my* heaven; which I did by looking at her, unperceived by Trevor, who was still contemplating the portrait, and who helped me at this moment by exclaiming that he had "never known an artist produce more effect." I thought so too; for the effect was "prodigious," as the Dominie would say; and before Agnes could recover herself, I hurried him out of the room, half ashamed, as he was becoming, of the neglect with which he had treated a woman who had still so much tenderness for him, as to make her show him such an attention as this present of her portrait. Credulity certainly accompanies matrimony; and this is undoubtedly one of the wise laws of the creation for keeping the peace.

Thus, Fred, you see how we stand. Agnes knows my love; and what is better, has given at least a tacit assent to what she knew to be a falsehood; and, better than all, that falsehood was to deceive her husband. I have lost my portrait, it is true; but I have made one step towards gaining the original.

And now I dare say, considering the vehemence of my last letter, that you are astonished at my coolness, after all these surprising circumstances. But the fact is, that my impatience was increased to such fever velocity, merely for the bare want of letting Agnes know of my love. It was insupportable to live with her, to converse with her, and yet find no opportunity of disclosing my passion. But that once done, my heart is relieved—it has leisure to repose itself. I begin to see my way: I feel like the general, who all enthusiasm before action, becomes cool and calculating the moment the first shell is thrown, or the first shot fired; or, like the inventor of the water rocket, my catamaran being launched, I shall lay upon my oars, and wait for the explosion: for I am much mistaken in my calculations, if the knowledge of my passion does not fire a train of ideas and feelings in the heart of Agnes, of the existence of which she had no conception, till this discovery acted like the match to enlighten her on the subject.

Besides, to tell you a truth, Fred, but this you know is entirely *entre nous*, there is among the little protegées of Mrs. Trevor's charity in the neighbourhood, one object deserving of a better fate, and of something warmer than charity: she lives in a cottage covered with woodbines, and

ministers to the wants of an aged parent; but with all her care, she will soon see that a few guineas will administer much more solid comforts than mere filial attention; and she is fast coming to this same conclusion, or I am much mistaken. You know, Fred, talents such as mine ought not to lie idle; and I cannot suffer my *grande passion* to scorch me quite to a cinder. But to return to the effect of this discovery upon the unsuspecting heart of Agnes.

You and I, Fred, once or twice in our lives, have seen the poor devils of Frenchmen walking carelessly and unconsciously on their ramparts, proud of their own strength, and laughing at our efforts to take them, when suddenly the mine beneath their feet has been sprung; and they have been astonished at finding themselves dancing a hundred or two yards in the air, wondering how the devil they came there, and what we were going to do next. I remember on one of these occasions, a French prisoner being a witness to this unexpected exaltation of his comrades, observed, taking a pinch of snuff, "Que les Anglais manquaient bien de la politesse de les faire sauter comme ça." That *comme ça* is a very useful little phrase to the French, and serves them upon all occasions, whether of mirth, or of melancholy, of delight, or of desperation.

But how I wander. What I meant to illustrate by this little allusion to engineering, was the position of the heart of Agnes before and after the discovery of my passion. Her heart is the citadel, almost unconscious of being besieged; the mine is composed of my long series of plots and attentions; the match that fires the train is the late discovery; and the passions and feelings, are the unsuspecting Frenchmen whom the springing of the mine has put into such confusion.

Oh, Fred! what would I not give to see her at this moment; to be a witness to all those conflicting passions of her heart, which are just now portrayed on her lovely countenance! for her countenance is indeed the mirror of her mind; her soul itself peeps out of the window of her eye—speaks from the corner of her lips—lives on the fair surface of her brow, and pants—where does it pant, Fred? —I dare not think of that; there 's a delicious madness in the thought, that hurls both sense and reason headlong from the mind, and "more than robs me of myself."

I 'll be bound, now, that the House of Commons in a

Whig administration never presented a more stormy seat of debate than the mind of Agnes does at this instant. Imagine, for a moment, that little bosom of hers a second St. Stephen's, with her heart in the chair—no, no; in St. Stephen's, the speaker says the least; and I would have her heart say a great deal upon the subject before the House. Yet the Speaker has the casting vote; and, as in the present state of the debate the "ayes and noes" may be equal, why the heart shall e'en take the chair to give the casting vote in favour of the motion, or rather commotion, brought forward by your humble servant.

Let us see; what is the question? Oh! only a change of administration, a new secretary for the home department, and the appointment of a new lord chamberlain. Sir Robert Leslie on his legs, very near the chair—*alias* the heart, Fred; don't forget that, or you will lose the "pith and marrow" of my argument. Well, imagine my speech over, filled with all my claims to the situations vacated by the defalcation of Trevor, and that I am reseated modestly amidst the cheers of all the members present: but there being something new, something out of the beaten track of common-place propositions in the bold measure I bring forward, Caution first rises in his place (the head), and speaks to character; states various fears that suggest themselves; doubts the possibility; questions the propriety; and anticipates the current of public opinion; is elaborate on the laws of the Consistorial Court; and, betraying great dread of discovery, sits down with a cold bow from the chairman, amid the yawns of half the assembly.

Love then attempts to get on his legs, but is unfortunately put down by Conscience, who had caught the Speaker's eye first. Well, Conscience enters into the debate *con amore;* suggests a thousand imaginary fears; conjures up the air-drawn dagger of Macbeth—the bloody ghost of Banquo; talks of the past, of the future, of time, and of eternity; portrays, in rather imposing terms, (imposing in every sense of the word, Fred,) a thousand bugbears, which have been so generally received as truths by the vulgar; and descants so learnedly and prosingly on laws human and divine, that the Feelings cry "Question! Question!" from all parts of the House, till Conscience sits down amidst the uproar, leaving the Speaker in great agitation.

Love here attempts again to rise in his place; but the Speaker's eye, being still fixed upon Conscience, as if that gentleman had not finished speaking, although he had resumed his seat, naturally enough catches a glimpse of Reason first. Love, therefore, impetuously sits down, muttering to himself that the Speaker must surely wear spectacles, or be fit to wear them, to have been attracted by the grave figure of Reason in preference to the gay one of his own.

Reason begins, as usual, to follow the old beaten track, and proses over all the dogmas that have been printed on the subject with quite as much tenacity, but without any of the imagination of Conscience, till the fatigue of the Speaker becomes evident, in spite of his forced attention. He then speaks of respectability; but is interrupted by cries of "Question! Question!" from the Feelings. He enters into character—"Question! Question!" again, from all parts of the House, excepting from Conscience. Reason again attempts to proceed, but is coughed down; and Love at length rises, amidst the cheers of the opposition.

Love begins his oration dexterously, in such a *sotto voce* style, that he is at first scarcely heard; but as his whispers become more audible, and as the sweetness of his breathings are embodied into sounds, every word makes its way with every member of the House; and the Speaker is evidently interested, as well as agitated, by the sentences which flow in such mellow periods, and which picture nothing but pleasure as their result. The bugbears of Conscience, and the arguments of Reason, are, under the influence of his eloquence, soon

> Melted into air—into thin air;
> And like the baseless fabric of a vision,
> Leave not a rack behind.

(Love never quotes correctly, you know, Fred; only just so much so as to serve his own purpose.) Well, to proceed with the debate. Love enters voluptuously into all the merits of his motion, in spite of some feeble cries of "Order! Order!" from the remote parts of the House. The sweetness of the orator's voice soon lulls Conscience to sleep, or at least into such a doze as will last till after the division. Reason, scandalized at the superior attention paid to the eloquence of Love—for all are so silent that

there is nothing heard but the beating of hearts, Fred—quits his seat in disgust. Caution prudently retires to prevent his appearing in the minority; and Love sits down amidst the cheering of the whole House. The old administration having quitted the arena, the opposition Feelings carry the question *nem. con.*; and your humble servant is voted by the chairman (the heart) into the privileges of his situation.

There 's a House of Commons for you, Fred! There 's a debate! worth all that St. Stephen's, with all its orators and politics, ever presented in the columns of a newspaper, from Woodfall down to the Morning Post.

Ha! La Tour, and with a portentious countenance! "Zounds, sirrah, do you know you have interrupted a debate in the House of Commons? Well, what is it?" "Une lettre timbrée de Florence!" "From Villars, I suppose?" "Non, monsieur." "For me?" "Non, monsieur; pour madame." "Then why bring it here? Oh, well, I see—you thought it might perhaps relate to me, and therefore have abstracted it from Mrs. Trevor's packet, and brought it for my perusal, lest it should betray—humph. La Tour, you have been guilty of a vile breach of trust, I believe of felony; what do you think will become of you for this? No, no; you need not take it away. The mischief's done; so put it down: but mind in future—in future, La Tour—should you ever perceive a letter from Italy again—from Italy mind—you understand me?" "Oui, monsieur." "Then take that purse, and divide its contents between youself and Mrs. Flounce. Ah, La Tour, I am afraid of your morals, I must put that girl on her guard;" and away he goes, with a grin from ear to ear, and with his shoulders half a yard higher than nature intended them. That fellow has no conscience, Fred; yet in his master's service he is certainly a most remarkably acute, sensible, d——d scoundrel.

Now for the letter, upon which I have not yet cast my eyes, for I never suffer La Tour to interrupt my writing: zounds! would you believe it? the cramp hand, the very same handwriting of the cursed intruder in my affairs at the Lago Maggiore:—what can there be in common between him and Agnes?

I have read the cursed scrawl: it is in the same hand and by the same author as that which caused all the mischief

with the lady of the lake: but I will copy it, that is, if my indignation does not induce me to tear it to atoms before I can complete it. So read.

"Although my former warning was disregarded, once more do I address you—once more do I venture to the brink of the precipice upon which you stand, to save you. (You see, Fred, they are old correspondents.) You are receiving a profligate to your friendship; fostering a serpent in your bosom, and bestowing your confidence on one whose only triumph and pleasure is in the destruction and the dishonour of your sex. God forbid that even a supposition contrary to your honour should enter my imagination; (complimentary, Fred;) but she that confides in her own strength, and not on that rock of ages which religion has built up for the protection of virtue and of principle, (rather methodistical,) is never safe from the artifice of the tempter—from the wily deceits of the licentious. Beware of Leslie! (You see he knows my name, and that I am the profligate received to her friendship, the serpent fostered in her bosom—not yet, Fred.) He is an unprincipled scoundrel, (hard words, Fred.) whom neither the laws of God nor man control; who sacrifices to his own selfishness and sensuality the virtue, the peace, the happiness, and the life of his victims. I am now in search of one betrayed by his arts, and deserted by his villany. Were it not for this and for my determination to do justice to injured innocence, I would be even now at your side, to expose to yourself and to the world the arts and the true character of this deceiver. Believe not in the speciousness of the exterior; remember the serpent's sting is not the less venomous from the variegated colours of his skin. (Quite metaphorical, Fred.) Remember, too, and bitterly do I regret it, that had my warming with regard to your husband met with attention, you would not now have been a neglected wife. (I owe him a good turn for reminding her of that, however, Fred, and I'll pay him ALL I owe him one day or other.) Neglect not my advice a second time; discard this man from your society; contamination is in his touch; but justice is at hand."

There, Fred, there is this precious letter, which I think quite as well in my hands as in those of Agnes, and therefore, upon second thoughts, she shall not see it. Now

Fred, you must be on the alert: this letter is dated Florence. three weeks back, and he was doubtless on his way then to the Lago Maggiore Ascertain instantly what is doing there. You see he has discovered my real name. and may now put in force that cursed ——. But you will prevent this. I would myself come over, but I cannot quit the field with the battle almost won. Upon your exertions, therefore, I rely. Spare no means; use gold like wheat, but sow it properly. There is *nothing* that cannot be bought in Italy, if you go to the proper market. Remember this, and discover this accursed intruder, that he may feel what it is to cross the path of Leslie. I must gallop away my indignation—so farewell till the evening, when I must again let my feelings evaporate in thus epistolising you.

## CHAPTER XII.

### LE PREMIER PAS.

By letters, not by words thy love begin,
And ford the dangerous passage with thy pen.
OVID.

—— this love indeed?
We men say more, swear more: but, indeed,
Our shows are more than will; for still we prove
Much in our vows, but little in our love.
SHAKSPEARE.

In spite of all the conventional forms with which the education of youth is loaded, and in spite of all the coldness, and callousness, and indifference to real feeling, which are generated in its progress, I much question whether there exists in the world that anomaly "the heart that never loved." To this "imperious mistress of the soul," at one period or other of their lives, almost every man and woman has been the slave; and however its impulses may have been checked by prudence, repressed by a sense of duty, or eradi-

cated by the tyranny or the kindness of parents and guardians, yet at some one period or other, it has been felt, and has given its generous impulses at the moment, to hearts which have now long since ceased to feel, and which in the maturity of age and callousness, can find no apology for a passion which they have so long since banished from their vocabulary of proper feelings.

Who among us, of either sex, does not remember the first softening of our hearts and natures which this passion has inspired—the scenes of the imagination of which it was the foundation—the delicious dreams of hope—the pangs of jealous fear—the determination to become worthy of the object in which our imaginations had conjured up the perfections of a hero or of an angel, according to the sex to which we belonged? And who can ever forget the intoxicating rapture of the accomplishment of all our wishes? and the heart-breaking disappointment, when that very accomplishment having left us nothing further to desire, stripped our fancied object of all these imaginary perfections, and reduced us to all the realities of human temper and infirmity? When we first began to find that

> Those cheerful suns were set for ever,
> That light to youth's gay paths impart.
> And dried that deep ideal river
> That fed the fountain of the heart:
> That sweet belief was gone and faded
> In beings born of dreams alone,
> And dreary truth had overshaded
> What once so fair and godlike shone.

It is a strange thing in human nature, that our propriety in a thing should generally give it a superior value in our eyes; thus every man thinks his own horse, his own wine, his own house, preferable to his neighbour's; and every woman thinks her own parties, her own equipage, her own dress far superior to that of any of her rivals. What a pity this selfish valuation does not extend to husbands and wives! yet that it does not may be evidenced by the most common observer of human nature: for I appeal to the generality of married people, whether they do not think every man's wife, and every woman's husband, better than their own; and I do not wish to include, in the support of this appeal, the various testimonies of the truth of the position, which the Courts of King's Bench and Doctors' Commons annually afford us, but merely those who entertain this opinion, without openly acting upon it.

Reader, if you are married, think for a few moments of your own helpmate, then cast your thoughts round the circle of your acquaintance, and acknowledge that my surmise is not far from the truth. If a man, your fancy will paint the eyes of such a friend's wife brighter than those which beam for you at home—her form rounder—her cheek fresher—her beauty more piquant: and if a woman, such a friend's husband would have allowed her an opera-box—would not have quarrelled with her last bill at Howell and James's—or compelled her to go to two drawing-rooms with the same liveries. Yet give these very people the husbands and wives they covet, and their own would become as immediately the object of their desire. Such is the perversity of human nature. Let any body deny it if they can.

When an innocent passion springs up in the female heart, it is welcomed with a soft consciousness of its sweetness, but at the same time with a dread of its power. The feeling is acknowledged at first in that "sacred recess of the mind," that "secret corner of the heart," in which we bury our inmost thoughts: not as one that is to be proclaimed, though it is one of which we have no reason to be ashamed; for love to a virgin heart is not a forbidden guest. Perhaps it may be a passion quite in accordance with all the duties of life, such a one as will meet with the smiling approbation of parents, the hearty approval of friends, and the rapture of an ardent lover, whose attentions are ripening the first bud of love into blossom, and teaching the heart, for the first time, to feel the meaning of the word passion.

How gently and imperceptibly, under such happy circumstances, does the feeling of love steal into the heart! How deliciously do the senses lend their aid to increase the influence of a passion which it seems a virtue to encourage! with what a thousand imaginings are our daily and nightly dreams crowded, the one warmer and softer than the other, till at length the whole soul is absorbed and delivers itself up to the unrestrained indulgence of that which in youth and innocence is the master passion of our nature!

Such is the delightful progress of the passion under such encouraging circumstances; but even here there are numberless reasons why a woman strives against its power; the idea of not meeting with a suitable return; the dread of disappointment, and a thousand other motives, teach the female bosom to give such a guest but a trembling welcome, and to

allow of his way with doubt and fear. What then must be her sensations who first feels the influence of a guilty love growing up in her heart, in spite of all her opposition: who strives, and finds that she strives in vain, to stifle a flame to which her determination to master it only adds fuel? With what horror must a virtuous mind view its unabating progress, in spite of all her resistance, and feel barrier after barrier broken down, till there seems to be no escaping from the resistless torrent of a passion that threatens to overwhelm virtue, honour, and every thing that is valuable to woman in its progress!

To feel the full influence of such a passion, and to feel and know the full measure of its guiltiness—to have the inclination to subdue its influence, and yet be sensible of the want of power to do so—to know the destroying effects of its progress, and yet to feel it march on, and on, and on, like the lava of a volcano, burning up every thing that is wholesome in its passage, till it requires an eternal watch upon the minutest action or circumstance, lest the senses betray the heart, and all be lost in an unguarded moment; is a misery, a wretchedness, a penance, which can be known by none but those who have been doomed to feel a guilty passion, to know it to be guilty, and to feel it to be irresistible.

It is in vain the heart turns to all its early recollections of virtue; in vain it contemplates the horror with which the same guilty feelings have been heard, and read of and blamed in others; and in vain a woman looks down the precipice, of which her being so near the brink only renders the dangers more conspicuous, and from which these very dangers sometimes give the impetus to plunge into the abyss.

Like the traveller in the burning forest, who meets the raging flames at every turn he makes in his attempt to escape, the victim flies to any opening that gives a glimmering hope, but recedes only more overpowered by the influence of the fire that threatens to consume him.

It is thus with the heart that suffers the first feelings of such a passion to obtain a temporary influence over the imagination. Like the lion's whelp, it may be crushed and destroyed in its infancy; but becomes the overpowering master, and tyrant, and destroyer, in its maturity. In the commencement of this predicament, did the unfortunate Agnes find herself. Nor was Leslie very wrong in his calculations on the state of

her heart. Almost deserted by her husband—the husband of her young love—with all her best feelings thrown back upon themselves, and her warm heart and affections chilled by the increasing coldness of him to whom they were once devoted, and these affections outraged by infidelities which his love of fashion had rendered notorious, it is not much to be wondered at that Trevor's hold upon her heart should be loosened; and this once accomplished, it is astonishing the rapid progress that the violated feelings make towards indifference.

Leslie was also right in calculating that Agnes possessed a heart which could not long exist in a state of perfect indifference: he knew that deprived of the *appui* which she had looked for in her husband, that it would not be long before her heart would seek another: and although he had insidiously spoke of nothing but friendship, he was assured that if that sentiment were once attained, others, and warmer ones, were likely to follow in the breast of one whose feelings were so acutely sensible as those of Agnes.

Agnes herself had no suspicion of the nature of her own sentiments; and had any body warned her of their tendency, and attempted to represent her danger, she would have laughed at the warning as useless, or spurned at the precaution as insulting. Surprised, however, into a discovery of the passion of Leslie for herself, the existence of which had never for a moment crossed her imagination, she trembled to find the effect it had upon her feelings; and shrunk from the consciousness that there was something in her own heart which prevented her from treating this discovery with the indignation which her sense of right, and propriety, and virtue, convinced her it deserved.

She felt as though she had been sleeping on a bed of flowers, and had been awakened by a serpent; and it was in vain that she attempted to shut her eyes and dream again. The uproar of her feelings was too great to deceive her; and she blushed in agony to find the certainty of the only evil that could render her state more wretched. And then came the degrading recollection of her tacit consent to a falsehood; quite equal in her own correct ideas to the invention of the falsehood itself. She felt degraded in the eyes of her servants, in the opinion of Leslie, and, what was worse than all, in her own estimation; and yet she saw no way of remedying this evil that was not pregnant with danger to the lives of others and to her own reputation. What she

was to do, became the first question, and her own sense of right and virtue, her increasing knowledge of the state of her own feelings, all suggested that a separation—a complete separation from Leslie, was absolutely necessary; and her false ideas of the generosity of his character induced her to imagine that she had only to hint that this was necessary to her comfort and peace of mind, to induce his speedy acquiescence.

At this moment she caught a glimpse of him through an opening in the park trees, galloping at a most furious rate; and, quitting the beaten road, she afterwards saw him take the country, clearing everything in his progress. She had before witnessed this method of riding down his feelings, and she judged that this was his attempt at present. She determined to make use of his absence to write her request; to speak it she found impossible. She might trust her handwriting, but she felt she could not trust her voice. She seized her pen, but found the task more difficult than she had imagined. Sheet after sheet was commenced and destroyed: it seemed to her impossible to express her ideas coolly, and as she considered they ought to be expressed. One letter, on a reperusal, appeared too kind, another too severe; and severity she did not think called for by an act that was involuntary, and by a discovery that had been purely accidental. She continued these attempts till the first bell rang; when finding herself still too much agitated to meet her party, she sent her apologies, and determined to pass the evening in her own room.

Leslie returned from his ride with his feelings of all kinds in some degree allayed by the violent exercise he had taken. He dressed himself quickly, and hurried into the drawing-room, anxious to see what would be his first reception from Agnes. His own conduct was quickly determined. He had clothed his features in humility and repentance; intended only to address her distantly; appear to avoid coming in contact with her, but at the same time contrive that she should catch his eyes fixed upon her when he might consider himself unobserved, with such an expression of deep affliction as, he thought, might induce her to view his passion "more in sorrow than in anger:" and this was all he anticipated at present. Once admitted to her confidence while she had a knowledge of his feelings, he thought his way would be easy.

With this view, he threw himself on a *fauteuil* in an attitude of deep abstraction, but still in a position where his eye

could command the entrance. Every time the door opened, he cast an unobserved, inquiring glance; but no Agnes appeared: nor did he know, until the second bell rang and dinner was announced, that an apology had been made for her non-appearance. Thus his acting had been useless; but though disappointed in the speedy *éclaircissement* of the morning's interview, which the drawing-room might have afforded, he was rather induced to augur favourably for himself from her absence. If it arose from feeling unsubsided, there were hopes; if from anger, there were hopes still. Anything, he concluded, was better for him than the indifference that would bring her into society; and though even this temporary absence was heart-burning in the present situation of affairs, because it prevented his finding in her countenance something that might indicate the state of her mind, yet, upon the whole, he was glad of it: and, being certain that she must meet the party who were to assemble the next day, he bore his present disappointment philosophically.

During the latter part of dinner, Leslie observed La Tour mingling with the servants who were in attendance; and surprised at the circumstance, for he knew that this was generally his *tête-à-tête* hour with Mrs. Flounce, he cast many inquiring glances at him as he officiously moved about the sideboard; but it was not till the dessert had been placed on the table, and that the servants were retiring, that he caught La Tour's eye fixed upon him with that peculiar expression which always denoted that something of importance had happened: this look was accompanied by an almost imperceptible beckoning motion of the hand, and a slight shrug of the shoulders which seemed to say—"Lord! Lord! what will this world come to?"

Leslie knew, by this movement of La Tour, that he was wanted; and he sat upon tenterhooks, imagining, hoping, and fearing a thousand things, till the retirement of the ladies gave him an opportunity, under the plea of sudden indisposition, to quit the dinner-room. Sometime after which, he resumed his letter to Villars, as follows:—

LESLIE TO VILLARS. (In continuation.)

Well, Fred; I rode down my indignation as furiously as though this demon of the cramp handwriting had been under my horse's feet; or, like the felons of some country, the

name of which I do not recollect, had been tied to his tail. I returned; but no Agnes. Illness—how these women lie when it serves their turn!—illness prevented her joining us during the evening. For illness read—what, Fred? what shall we read? Well, never mind; you shall judge. At the conclusion of dinner—by the by, the dullest of all dull dinners to me—La Tour favoured me with one of those looks which you as well as I know so well, and which have often summoned us to many a banquet of delight. Surprised and curious, you may imagine that I escaped as soon as possible. I found the faithful fellow waiting near the vestibule; he put on an important look, took out a key, and, with the gravity of a real lord-chamberlain, led the way to my dressing-room, the door of which, to my surprise, he unlocked. I asked him why he had locked it? Still he gave me no answer, but ushering me into the room, pointed to a little pink note that lay on my dressing-table. I won't tell you how my heart jumped at the sight: for, though there was no superscription, there was no doubting who was my correspondent. But how did it get there? Had Flounce brought it? No. Had the lady given it to La Tour? No. How then? Why, with her usual delicacy, unwilling to trust a servant with her secret, she had been her own twopenny-postman, and taking advantage of the dinner-time, when she supposed everybody of course engaged, had brought it herself. Think of this, Fred!—Agnes, the beautiful Agnes, the object of all my desires, in my dressing-room! La Tour saw her—I hate him for it. Concealed behind the drapery of a small bay-window, he saw, by the reflection of a large glass, the door of the room gently open, and then shut. Surprised, he remained silent; in a moment it again opened, and Agnes—*mi lady*, as La Tour calls her—glided into the room: with a pale face, and in great agitation, she approached the dressing-table, seemed to hesitate for a moment, deposited the note, then clasping her hands and lifting up her eyes to heaven, she hastily quitted the apartment. By heavens! Fred, if the note itself were not at this moment laying before me, written on double-wove gilt pink paper, I should doubt the evidence of my senses, and think it all a dream. Well; La Tour, without touching the note—he knew I would never have forgiven him if he had—immediately placed all my writing apparatus, with lights, ready for my reply; and, locking the apartment, to make all secure even against Agnes herself, in case she should repent the step she had taken, came to sum-

mon me. Her visit to this room while it is mine, has given the apartment a delicious interest it never had before; the perfumes seem the sweeter, and the mirror which reflected her person the brighter for her momentary presence. Oh, La Tour! what would I not have given to have been in your place! I quite hate the fellow for his good fortune. But to my note; you shall have it *verbatim*. Ma'amselle Scudery, now would have headed it

THE BEAUTIFUL AGNES TO THE PERSEVERING LESLIE.

Now read, Fred, with attention.

"Oh, sir! to what a dreadful alternative has your imprudence reduced me. (Imprudence—only imprudence, you see, Fred!) Compelled, by the unhappy circumstances of this morning, either to give a tacit consent to the propagation of a falsehood, or by the truth to run the hazard of involving you and others, myself out of the question; in results the bare idea of which makes me tremble (ME, as well as others), I have, to my shame and remorse, passively permitted the former; and, by my silence, have given a false colour to a transaction, which now, alas, I find it too late to remedy. Sunk in my own estimation, degraded in your opinion (MY opinion, Fred; you see she *wishes* to be well with me), perhaps exposed to the suspicions of my servant, I see but one way—one only way, to act, so as to extricate myself from the dreadful dilemma in which these circumstances have placed me (I could point out another, couldn't I, Fred?) and that is to implore your immediate abscence; and I am sensible that, in appealing to the heart and good feeling of Sir Robert Leslie, I shall not appeal in vain, as he must feel the imperious necessity for his departure as much as I do. (Imperious necessity, Fred!) I reproach you not. I feel all the obligations which a series of kindnesses have conferred on myself and another; let me, oh let me, sir, attribute them to the only legitimate source from which they ought to have sprung: they shall then be alone remembered, and the scene of this morning buried in oblivion. (Shall it?) You will perhaps say, that your sudden departure might create surprise (you see she finds an apology for my deferring it); but there are many circumstances to which it may be attributed (you see she can counsel a little lying upon occasion): and I am sure when you know that it is necessary to the peace of one in whose real happiness you

have hitherto appeared to take an interest, you will not refuse to depart instantly. (How inhospitable in her own house!) The step I am now taking may be blamed; but as the circumstances themselves preclude the possibility of conversation (why, pray?), I feel myself justified in adopting it: and I feel, also, that I am confiding in a man of honour, who will do his utmost to obliterate the effects of an involuntary error."

There, Fred. As Byron says,

> This note is written upon gilt-edged paper,
> With a neat little crow-quill, slight and new;
> Her small white hand could hardly reach the taper,
> It trembled as magnetic needles do.

And that her hand did tremble, the zig-zag direction of every line evinces; and just where the "series of my kindnesses" is alluded to, there's a blot, and the ink is a little lighter-coloured, as though there had been a tear mingled with it, and hastily brushed away. Women will sometimes shed them on the like occasions.

Well, Fred, I have weighed every word of this epistle—nay, every letter—with the accuracy of an alchemist transmuting his materials into the precious metal for which he has sold himself to Satan; and with more success than the deluded philosopher, since I think I can extract from this letter the "golden hope" that——I may not despair.

But to go! To quit her! No, no, Agnes. I never obeyed a woman but once in this particular; and what did I get for it, some years afterwards, but laughter and reproaches? But I was then a boy; I am now a man, and know my advantages too well to throw them away.

Your dense understanding, Fred, will, I dare say, never discover, in the delicacy of this letter—in the command it contains—in the very slight allusion it makes to my offence—the hope that I derive from it; but these are things which speak to the heart of the lover himself, and to the understandings of nobody else. Well, I must now reply; and what do you think that reply will be? It will be to consent to her proposition, to promise anything she wishes, to vow absolute obedience to her behests. Vows? say you. Yes, Fred, such vows as men always make and women always believe. I will then make my obedience depend upon an interview—a last interview I will call it—and I will urge such reasons for this

interview—such pungent reasons, Fred—that she shall think it quite right and proper to grant it ; and if she does——why —why then—Good bye, Fred.

Leslie devoted a great part of the night to the composition of such a letter as would convince Agnes of the sincerity of his intentions, without denying the truth of her discovery. He adopted her phrase, and represented the "involuntary" nature of his offence, and that it carried its own punishment in the never-ending agony which it must create in such a heart as his. Then followed the promise to obey her, and the request for one interview, that her advice might strengthen his resolution ; and without this, he adverted to the fears of the absolute impossibility of his obedience.

The letter once finished, the next step was the delivery. Servants, he saw, were not the proper medium. His only hope of her accepting it at all, was her being impressed with certainty that their communication was known to none but themselves. This had, no doubt, been her only motive for bringing her own note herself. He must, therefore, deliver it into her own hands, or place it where it could be seen by no one else.

He knew that the next day, it being the intention to receive several of the gentry who had interest in the county, that she must be early in the morning-room. La Tour was therefore placed so as to give him notice of her appearance. The instant he heard she was there, he dressed himself negligently, and, having ascertained from his glass, that his privation from sleep had given a cast of languor and paleness to his countenance, he added to this an appearance of sorrow and repentance well calculated to make the impression he desired, and joined the party.

Agnes was seated on an ottoman, with her head hanging over a portfolio of prints ; to which Leslie, with his usual quickness, perceived she was paying no attention.

At his entrance, which she seemed to feel, rather than to see, the eloquent blood rushed into her face, but receded as quickly to her heart, leaving her countenance pale as Parian marble. She attempted to rise as he slowly, and in a voice scarcely audible, "hoped that her indisposition had passed away." Her reply only trembled on her lips—the sounds were not embodied into words ; and she resumed her contemplation of the prints, in which he apparently joined her.

Everybody else in the room was too much occupied in their pursuits to have leisure for observations on those of others.

Leslie and Agnes were silent; but it was the silence of thought and feeling. Her hand mechanically turned over the plates in the folio, and that of Leslie as mechanically assisted her. Her eye was averted—his fixed upon her countenance with an earnestness that would have perused her soul. Suddenly she started; she saw a letter lie on the print before her. She cast one hasty glance of indignation at Leslie, and saw him standing, pale and silent, with his hands clasped, in an attitude of respectful supplication. His position was such, that none could see the letter besides himself. A moment might bring some one else to join them in looking over the portfolio. Her dread of the letter's being seen, was quite as great as any other by which she was assailed. It was impossible, she saw, for Leslie to resume it unperceived, and quite as impossible to leave it there. Leslie lifted up the next print so as to preclude the possibility of observation, and, by slanting its position, he contrived to place the letter near her handkerchief and gloves, which lay at the edge of the portfolio. Agnes covered the letter with her handkerchief, and took them both up, while her whole neck and countenance were suffused with a burning blush. Leslie's heart beat audibly, and an expression of triumph stole into his dark eye in spite of his caution and his self-command; but it was unperceived by Agnes.

When the agitation of the moment had a little subsided, Leslie whispered in her ear: "Read it quickly; its perusal is absolutely necessary. It will set your mind at ease; it will restore the tranquillity I have so wantonly destroyed. Grant the request it contains, and whatever your commands are they shall be obeyed." So saying, he left the room, as though unable longer to control his own feelings, and apparently out of respect to hers.

He had said this lest it should be her intention to return his letter unopened.

What female is there that has not experienced the agitation arisng from the receipt of the first *billet-doux* from that man whom the heart is secretly inclined to favour, although she is yet unwilling to acknowledge such a feeling even to herself? Who does not remember the hesitation whether it shall be opened and read, or returned with the seal unbroken? And when curiosity, or some nobler and stronger passion,

has at length induced the determination to peruse it, what female mind can forget the palpitation of the heart, the dizziness of the eyes as they run rapidly over its contents, and the almost painful stoppage of breath by which the perusal of it is accompanied? The agitation of the moment renders the first rapid and agitated glance at its contents almost useless. Her eyes and heart have but half drunk of the delicious poison it contains; but, convinced of the affection of the favoured object, she breathes more freely—more calmly, and sits down to a second perusal, when every sentence—nay, every word —tells to her affections and to her senses. It is then that, in the solitude of her own chamber or *boudoir*, surrounded by those silent witnesses of a woman's privacy which never betray her secret, that she makes that confession to her own heart, which months will not encourage her modesty to make to her lover.

If a letter, then, whose purport is perfect innocence, should create such a sensation in the female bosom—if a letter, the contents of which might perhaps be her glory if the writer be an object worthy of her affection, create such an agitation —what must be the effect of the first guilty *billet-doux* that she receives? What must be the tumult of her mind when she knows and feels that the paper she holds in her hands is a violation of the best laws of society—of the sacred oath which she has sworn at the altar of her God—of all the ties that bind society together—and that its discovery must tumble her headlong from the pinnacle of reputation, as those whom she has hitherto despised! Imagine the hurried and breathless agitation with which it is received—the furtive and fearful glance cast round lest its delivery should have been seen —the quick caution with which it is concealed, and not unfrequently, next that very heart which is beating with the consciousness of the guilt with which such a letter is pregnant!

Conscious as Agnes was of the innocence of her own intentions, and of the peculiarity of the circumstances that rendered her reception of the letter necessary, she yet experienced all the agitations of guilt, and kept her glance riveted on the engraving before her, afraid lest, in looking up, she should encounter some eye fixed upon her with suspicion, or with scorn.

Nothing, however, had been observed; and in a short time she sought the solitude of her own apartment, to deliberate whether the letter should be perused or returned unopened.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### SUSPENSE.

——— But oh! methinks how slow
These hours wane, they linger my desires,
Like to a step-dame, or a dowager
Long withering out a young man's revenue.
SHAKSPEARE.

### LESLIE TO VILLARS.

*Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte*—'When a woman hesitates, she 's lost.' Oh, Villars, Villars! how am I trying at this moment to argue myself into a thorough belief of the truth of these aphorisms! for if they *are* true, then is the most lovely she that nature ever formed—then is the woman who has excited this volcano in my mind, and has made my heart overflow with a passion hot as the burning lava of Vesuvius—mine. Yes, Villars, mine!—mine!—mine! three times mine; and yet not once! But I must be cool—I must not lose my generalship: keep down, thou beating rebel, heart, to the principles of that *sang-froid* which can take advantage of the passions of others to gratify one's own. But where the devil am I wandering? This must be Greek to you, Villars; and yet it is no dead language, but the living language of a living, beating, thrice-alive heart.

Thus wrote Leslie, and thus he proceeded:—

Would you believe it, Villars? this woman, this paragon of beauty and virtue, this creature of flesh and blood, and warmth and life, has consented to give me an interview.

And yet why should you not believe it? are not all the sex the same? is there not a way to every woman's heart? and the only difficulty is to know how to pave it properly. Yes, yes,

Experience finds
That sundry women are of sundry minds,
With various crotchets fill'd, and hard to please,
They therefore must be caught by various ways

and I have found the way at last to this most impregnable of female hearts.

An interview, Villars, at night—in a grove—amidst trees that whisper only to the zephyrs, and zephyrs tell no tales—not far from the ocean, whose gentle murmurs are the best accompaniments for lovers' vows, because they come sweeping over the sands, washing out the traces of all things there, and sink back into the fathomless ocean that produced them. There is a cascade too that comes tumbling from one of the neighbouring heights till it reaches the sea. A cascade! emblematical of a fall. 'Tis the sixth day of the month, too, and you recollect the Roman proverb—

Sub sextis semper perdita Roma fuit.

How I catch at every thing that affords a hope! Be still, my heart. But Villars, isn't this a *premier pas?* Is not this hesitation? Do you think, Fred, these blessed aphorisms *are* true?

What a tumult am I in! one would suppose that this was the first passion I had ever felt; the first woman I had ever met. Then time too—my watch stands still; I hate the sun. Joshua seems to have revisited the earth, and again to have exerted his power over its great luminary. And I have to go through the fatigue of a damned dinner, too; the parade of folly; the cant of society; the nothingness of ceremony and politeness: my watch *does* stand still; and night will never come.

Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds,
Towards Phœbus' mansion; such a wagoner
As Phaeton would whip you to the west,
And bring in cloudy night immediately.

And a very wagoner he seems; for he moves no faster than those cumbersome overloaded vehicles y'clept Birmingham flies.

Spread thy close curtain, love performing night!
That runaway's eyes may wink; and Agnes
Leap to these arms, untalked of, and unseen!
Lovers can see to do their amorous rites
By their own beauties.

My grove will be illuminated—

> ——or if love be blind,
> It best agrees with night. Come, *civil* night.

We have found her civil, havn't we, Fred? and have found those who were very willing to follow her example, and be *civil* too.

Was not this a pretty speech to put into the lips of a tender maiden of sixteen? But it is said that Shakspeare knew the sex, and so do we, Fred; yet I do not imagine that any of them wished for the hour of their assignation with us quite so warmly as Juliet did with hers for Romeo. They might perhaps have thought

> the day tedious,
> As is the night before some festival
> To an impatient child, that hath new robes,
> And may not wear them.

They might perchance have felt thus much; and here again the "master-mind," by the mention of "new robes," showed his accurate insight into the sex.

But I cannot argue: it is like playing at marbles while the house is on fire, or at pushpin in a charge of cavalry, to attempt to sport while my heart is thus set upon one object so intently and so intensely, that I can direct the current of my thoughts and feelings no other way.

And yet if I do not give them vent, they will consume me before the wished-for hour arrives, and leave me nothing but the flame, while the stamina that feeds it will be reduced to a cinder.

What is she doing now? I would give worlds, if I had the invisible powers of the fairy ring, to see her in her *boudoir*. Imagination paints her still trembling and hesitating, half repenting, yet still determined. Perhaps, too, she has some of the burning anticipations which consume me; the same eager impatience for the coming hour. Her hour, perhaps, must come! and if hers, mine! Dost think, Villars, that our thoughts are really meeting in the grove, where she has promised our persons shall meet so soon. Soon did I call it? it is an age, twenty ages till then.

Dost think that she paints to her mind's-eye the shady cypress? for there *is* a cypress—that is, a funeral tree, is it not? emblematical of something that must die and be buried. Can this be ominous? Can its omen have any reference to her virtue and repentance? We shall see.

Perhaps at this moment the gurgling waters sound in her ear; the moonlight already sleeps upon the bank; all is hushed; and her imagination may be painting the interview according to my wishes, and to my intentions.

Intentions! but am I not pledged—have I not promised? Well; and have I not been pledged, and have I not promised before? Promises, forsooth—and to a woman!

> ——————— I have made a thousand of them.
> They are things indifferent, whether kept or broken,
> Mere venial slips, that grow not near the conscience.

And who ever was a bit the worse, or a bit the wiser, because I forfeited the pledge or broke the promise? I beg their pardon, they *were* the *wiser;* or it was their own fault.

But is not Trevor your friend, say you? Certainly not; for he has married the only woman I ever could have married, had I been inclined to wear the yoke of matrimony.

Friend, indeed! It is true we have intrigued together, got drunk together—our debaucheries have been in common; we have met at the same gaming-tables; we have committed the same follies; participated in each other's vices: but is this friendship?

Had the fellow bivouacked with me night after night under the same planets on the cold snow-bed; been by my side on a forlorn hope; mounted a breach with me in the face of the enemies' fire; or followed me in a charge of cavalry into the ranks of a hollow square, as thou hast done, then indeed I might have thought for half an hour before I attempted his wife.

And this I say, Villars, to give you security in case your broad shoulders should ever be tempted into the pale of matrimony; in case you should ever be condemned to hear a lawn-sleeved surpliced rogue, whom perhaps we recollect a drunken dog at Oxford, mumble over the ceremony which so appropriately begins with "Dearly beloved," and ends with "amazement."

Then it is under his own roof; and this you will say is a breach of hospitality: but can that be called a violation of hospitality, which only shows your just appreciation of your hostess? Dost remember the poet, Fred?

> ——————— none can sooner stir
> Affection in the wife, than he that 's most
> Familiar with the husband, nor can move
> More freely and suspectless.

What devils these poets were from time immemorial! Poetry was certainly invented for the delight and the destruction of women.

Besides, it is not hospitality that courts me here—'tis vanity. He knew that to have "Sir Robert Leslie," was the most certain method of filling his house with that circle out of which he cannot live; and here I am! Am I to be here without remuneration? Am I to lend my attraction gratis, and thus put out my person without interest? Certainly not. Therefore Trevor must pay for his vanity, as other people pay for their playthings; and if he pays rather too dearly, why he may perhaps benefit by the lesson to the end of his life, and that will balance our accounts.

Depend upon it, Villars, that the man who will introduce such fellows as you and I are to his wife—and that such a wife—is not to be pitied. We must speak the truth sometimes, Fred; and neither you nor I are blind to our own merits. Besides, suppose a case—A, has a treasure, which, though a real treasure, is valueless in his eyes; and he not only does not appreciate it, but he neglects it, and leaves it about for every little purloiner to attempt its larceny. B, on the contrary, knows the value of this treasure; covets it with all his soul, intends to cherish it, and with such intentions lays a plan for obtaining it out of unworthy hands. The *ergo* I leave to you, Fred.

This last tirade I believe to be partly owing to that sapient sentence in your last, in which you say that while I treat Trevor in this manner, what security have you in case of marriage? But I have proved that I think this quite a different matter; and yet, by my soul, Fred, your suggestion set my fancy gadding, and I began to think what sort of woman you would choose, and whether I should like her; and then I felt a kind of involuntary chuckling in my throat, not unlike a laugh, and I thought that the "Honourable Mrs. Frederick Villars," at full length, would not look badly in my list—I dreamed about it, too. Upon the whole, I wish you had not put it into my head. However, it does not matter, as you have no intention of marrying. Let me know if you have, and I'll grow better.

How I wish I could obey my worthy grandfather's lesson and take old Time by the fore-lock, and pull him on a little.

Ah! the first bell: time does get on; my watch does not stand still: La Tour—La Tour! *dépêche-toi donc.* I shall

soon see my charmer ; soon see her eyes for the first time cast down with a consciousness of something that she never felt before : for I am more than ever convinced that such a fellow as Trevor is, could never awaken all the sensibilities of such a heart as hers. There are, I am sure there are, a thousand hidden feelings—a thousand concealed sensations, of which she is herself unconscious, and which it requires but a master-hand to call into existence.

Be it my task to awake the sleeping tempters.—Be it my task to teach her of what her heart is capable ; and to call up in the paths of passion a thousand fragrant flowers, which I shall crop, as they spring into blossom, in all their freshness, under the genial influence of my own kisses.

What a pity is it they will not last ; is not it, Fred ? But this is not our fault ; 'tis nature's fault, or perhaps her virtue, to give a zest to novelty and variety.

And then, too, what has been novel to us may preserve its novelty to others, you know ; and thus the giddy round of life is run.

My heart becomes easy, now I see that time does not absolutely stand still.

Here is La Tour ; so now for my toilet, and adieu till—till when ; why, till *then*. If thou canst not guess the meaning of that "THEN," thou art a more stupid clod of your mother-earth than I take you for.

La Tour now spread out the silk stockings, the combs, the brushes, the silver-mounted dressing-case, and the gold-handled razors, together with all the *et-ceteræ* of a perfect gentleman's toilet, which is almost as elaborate in its appointments, as that of the most capricious lady of fashion.

Leslie was no effeminate coxcomb, but he know very well the full value of person, and he consequently made its preservation and adornment his care, as far as directing La Tour to study every thing that could tend to these objects that did not degenerate into effeminacy.

He knew, too, that the dressing-rooms of their masters and mistresses were frequently the conversation of the servants in the steward's room ; and he had experience that these conversations frequently met the ears of the masters and mistresses themselves ; and he was conscious that an elaborate and attentive toilet was never lost upon the mind of any female who heard of it by accident. He never missed a point ;

and tried to be as great a man to his valet in the retirement of his dressing-room, as he was to the society by which he was surrounded in the publicity of the drawing-room. And here let me recommend his example in this particular to both sexes; nay, even when alone, act always in all particulars as though the eye of society were upon you. Preserve all the etiquettes of life when alone and in your family, and they sit easily and gracefully upon you in public; while if you relax from their observance in your private hours, your manners appear when put on to sit awkwardly, like the Sunday clothes of a linen-draper's apprentice.

While Leslie was thus occupying his mind, and amusing his impatience by attention to his toilet, Agnes sat almost unconscious before hers.

Her mind was absorbed in the contemplation of the step she had taken. It was in vain that she reviewed all the arguments which had induced her to consent to the interview. In vain she spread out the whole tissue of conclusions and deductions which had led to it: what she had thought solid, now appeared flimsy; and not even her innate knowledge that she was instigated by a virtuous motive, could reconcile her to the step she had taken.

Perhaps, also, her heart began to tell her too loudly, that Leslie was not quite indifferent to it; perhaps she began to find that all the warm feelings of which she had once been so proud, had only slumbered, and had not been extinguished; perhaps she began to experience sensations which sent her heart's blood up into her cheek; but this, instead of encouraging and tempting her, alarmed her. The chord was again struck, but she determined to crush its vibrations, and banish the enterprising hand that had dared to strike it.

It was in vain that Mrs. Flounce spread out the costly dresses of her wardrobe, to tempt her choice; and in vain that she reminded her, again and again, that the dressing-bell had sounded.

Agnes was too much absorbed in her own reflections—too much terrified at her own sensations—to give any thought to the routine of common things.

She was, therefore, dressed after her maid's own taste; and, as the second bell rang, she moved, almost unconsciously and mechanically, towards the drawing-room, still undetermined whether to keep or to break her appointment.

What a contrast between the two! The one plotting and

planning, and thinking upon destruction; the other insensible of danger, yet dreading she knew not what. The destroyer attending to all the *minutiæ* of the toilet; and the intended victim insensible and careless of any thing but that which absorbed her mind.

When she entered the room the party were all assembled, and her entrance was the signal for the announcement of dinner.

Leslie was leaning against the side of a window, with his eye fixed impatiently on the door. Their eyes met as she entered, but hers were immediately withdrawn; and she seized the arm of an old peer, who stood immediately near the door, and selected him as her escort to the dinner-table.

Leslie bit his lip, but offered his arm to Lady Mary Trentham. Trevor, as usual, walked off with Lady Flora; and the rest of the guests paired off either as they had premeditated, or promiscuously, according to circumstances.

At first the conversation, like that at all English dinners, even in the best society, consisted principally in the little attentions of the table; disquisitions of cookery among the old, and challenges to Champagne among the young. The merits of Ude, and the *patisserie* of Gunter and Jarrin—the Vins de Beaume, Clos de Vougeot, Epernay, and of Xeris—were all successively canvassed.

This is the great difference between an English and a continental dinner-table. Here they seem literally met to eat and drink, and, very frequently, to talk of nothing else. People are pressed to eat, and challenged to drink; and this dish, and that wine, are successively recommended, either by the host or hostess, or by those who have partaken of it.

On the continent it is different. Their table seems a reunion of the family and guests for the purposes of conversation. All the trouble and attention of the dinner-table devolves upon the servants; every one calls for what they like, and eat or drink whatever and whenever they please, just as their appetites and inclinations serve.

One is not there obliged to drink a glass of wine against one's inclination, or run the risk of offending by refusing.

Surely these are manners more congenial to rationality and comfort, than those of our own dinner-tables? and surely it is quite degrading enough to poor human nature, that she cannot exist unless sustained by a certain quantity of fish, flesh, and fowl, without making the operation and

gratification of eating the subject of a conversation, to shine in which one has only to read the "Almanach des Gourmands," Dr. Kitchener, and "The Lady's Essay upon Puffs and Patisserie?"

During dinner Leslie, in spite of the light artillery with which he was attacked by Lady Mary Trentham and his opposite neighbours, did not fail to fix his eye occasionally on Mrs. Trevor, who sat, almost silent, at the head of the table.

As he observed her downcast looks and evident absorption, he trembled for her determination as to her appointment; but as hers was not a mind that could lightly promise, he trusted to its performance, and betook himself to meet and return the fire of his fair adversaries, who were rallying him upon his insensibility to their attractions, and to the example which he held out to other young men who would imitate him.

Trevor flirted openly with Lady Flora, who, by her bold manners, and evident pleasure at his attentions, gave occasion to many significant shrugs and uplifted eyes from the silent consumers of the delicacies before them. Surely, thought Leslie, she cannot be so much above her sex as to view this with indifference? and he immediately, but artfully, tried various ways to attract her attention to the behaviour of her husband; but without success; or, if she did observe it, it was with that high-souled indifference that never suggested the thought of retaliation, with which Leslie was in hopes she might be inspired.

At length the napkins were removed; the finger glasses, the *eau de Cologne*, and *esprit de rose*, had gone round; the glittering rings had again taken their places on the taper fingers of both sexes; the dessert was placed, the servants withdrew, and a momentary silence succeeded by various disquisitions on operas, scandal, politics, literature, and the whole *olla podrida* of the conversation of a full table, surrounded by creatures of so many different elements.

Perhaps the art and tact of a hostess is never so well shown as in the distribution of her guests at her table, and in the care she displays that the tempers and pursuits of those thrown in contact with each other, should so accord as to produce unanimity of opinion, or so contrast as to elicit mirth and conversation from the collision of opposite sentiments. In this arrangement Mrs. Trevor was, in general, very fortu-

nate; a quick perception of character, a pretty thorough knowledge of the minds and tempers of her guests, led her never to offend in this particular. But, on the present occasion, an almost promiscuous arrangement had taken place at the table, and, except in one or two instances, where a flirtation had induced the choice of a neighbour, the other guests by accident were most incongruously mixed together.

Thus a heavy doctor of divinity, famous for his learned disquisitions on cookery, was placed next a sentimental young lady, to whom the very mention of "eating and drinking" was horrid. The voracious doctor was for filling her plate with everything that was within his reach, while she could only say faintly, "No, no," and smell to her *vinaigrette*, or fan away the fumes of the viands.

"You are very delicate, ma'am, I am afraid," said the doctor; "you don't take enough sustenance to preserve the existence of a sparrow; and allow me to observe, young lady, in my capacity as a clergyman, that it behooves us—aye, behooves us—to show our gratitude to a wise and beneficent Providence by partaking largely of the goods which it has given us.—Another slice of that venison, if you please."

The worthy divine, who was thus showing his religion and his gratitude to Providence, and gratifying his appetite at the same time, would not have wondered so frequently at the very delicate appetite of his fair neighbour had he known that, at a hot luncheon at three, she could devour poultry, Perigord pies, and pine-apple jelly, with any young person of her teens.

The consequence of their immediate contiguity was, that the person thought her a squeamish, affected miss, who preferred chalk and slate-pencil, and the delicacy of her complexion, to good, wholesome food; and the ethereal young lady thought him anything but divine.

Immediately opposite sat a young fox-hunter—a regular tally-ho, neck and neck, three-bottle man—carrying the rudest health that ever sat on a ruddy cheek, and hating all dinners excepting those after a fox-hunt—taking interest in no adventures but those of the chase—knowing the pedigree of his horses better than of his own family—valuing his dogs more than the best society in Christendom, and admiring their deep baying as they scudded across the plain, to all the compositions of a Rossini, or all the execution of a Pasta.

And yet, withal, he was a fine, manly-looking fellow; and

one would have no objection to know that these were the worst traits of our modern young country gentlemen.

He d——d London as a bore—returned another for his own borough—and considered all fine parties as so many trammels to such a boisterous, harum-scarum fellow as he really was, and as he chose to be.

He was placed between Miss Letitia Folio and her sister, Miss Sensilla Folio, both regular blues, and famous for their literary attainments; the first of whom was as deaf as a post, and the other as nervous as a sensitive leaf. Our honest fox-hunter, over whose birth Harpocrates had certainly not presided, was very voluble in his remarks, and gave his neighbours accounts of hair-breadth 'scapes, five-barred gates, running to earth, &c. He was perfectly aware of the physical misfortunes of his fair neighbours, but he, unfortunately, perpetually mistook the one for the other; and while he whispered—if any sound emitted by his stentorian lungs could be called a whisper—into the ear of the deaf lady, he roared with the tremendous sound of a tally-ho into that of her sister: so that the one was entirely unconscious that she was addressed, and went on sipping her wine and picking her partridge with the greatest equanimity, while the other kept starting in her chair at his vociferous remarks, till she nearly overset her wine and every thing near her, and was once or twice nearly putting the fork into her eye instead of her mouth.

Our Nimrod, however, went on eating and drinking, and whispering and roaring, quite unconscious of the inattention paid to him on the one side, and the mischief he was doing on the other.

The facetious Mr. Quibble, who prided himself upon his puns, and who was vulgar enough to utter them whenever they came into his head, was unfortunately, in his own opinion, quite lost between two antiquated maidens, the rigidity of whose features had never relaxed since the age of twenty, except at a tale of scandal, or at the loss of a reputation.

His jokes were therefore quite thrown away; and what he thought ought to have been a palpable hit, and "the very best thing he had said a long time," was absolutely unheard or unnoticed, though he gave three editions of it.

This was an observation that our fox-hunter, pouring wine by pailfuls down his capacious throat, put him in mind of—a quarto between two folios, alluding to his fair neighbours

Lady Clara Mowbray, a fine lively girl, was placed between two political peers, who discussed the national debt, the Catholic question, the finance report, and the anticipated budget, across her, till their words entering both ears at the same time, created a jumble in her poor little head that she wished to get to her piano to dispel.

The physician and apothecary, for whom there were always covers during the residence of the family, were placed together, and hating one another cordially, they took wine with each other, with faces that would have made a spectator imagine they were swallowing their own potions.

The worthy professor, who had arrived from London in the morning, was describing the Pons Asinorum and Euclid's 47th, by way of pastime to two young ladies, for he could think of no other playthings than angles, rhomboids, and parallelograms, while the young ladies themselves were thinking of far other propositions than those of Euclid.

D'Oyley discussed every subject that met his ear with the same volubility, and as though he were perfect master of everything connected with it; and never finished a sentence, whether it were of poetry or cookery, of politics or pleasure, without his favourite addition of "Well, if there is anything I do understand," &c.

Trevor continued to give Lady Flora his undivided attention, and Agnes was constrained to keep up a desultory conversation with the elderly peer, who had handed her down, and the new member for the county on her left, while Leslie was martyrizing under the pretty conceits of his fair companion, and watching with scrutinizing though furtive glances, the various changes of countenance which were exhibited on that face which was really the "tell-tale" of the mind within.

At length Agnes rose, and gloves, fans, and *vinaigrettes*, were collected by the ladies, who followed her.

Leslie caught her eye once in the general move, but it spoke nothing by which he could interpret her intentions.

He rushed to the door, and was luckily in time to open it for the retreating fair ones, thinking he might receive some signal, some slight recognition of the engagement; but she passed without giving any, and he closed the door upon the rustling silks with an agony of uncertainty and impatience.

The gentlemen now gave themselves up much more freely to the bottle than is generally the present usage in London;

but those who cultivate electioneering interests must give in to the vices as well as the customs of the electors; for many a member has been elected for a borough more through the idea of his being a "jolly fellow," than from any patriotism or talent, or other claim he possessed to qualify him for a seat in the British senate.

Trevor was very anxious to keep up the preponderance of his interest in the county, and for that purpose paid particular attention to the young Nimrod, and pledged him in bumper after bumper, to his hunting toasts, till, to Leslie's great joy, he perceived the wine to take a sensible effect on his brain.

Leslie, wrapt up in himself, did not join in the conversation. He was too restless, too impatient, too uncertain of the events of the night. His passions were up with expectation; his heart was on fire with the project he meditated, and he had the utmost difficulty to control his feelings so that they should not betray his anxiety.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE ASSIGNATION.

——————————In such a night
Stood Dido with a willow in her hand
Upon the wild sea-banks, and wav'd her love
To come again to Carthage.
——————————In such a night
Did Jessica steal from the wealthy Jew,
And with an unthrift love did run from Venice.
SHAKSPEARE.

THE place that Leslie had named in his letter for the interview was a favourite spot with Agnes, and one to which he knew she was in the habit of resorting on moonlight nights, to seek some relief from the heartless set with which her own drawing-room was so frequently filled, in the contemplation of the beautiful scenery which surrounded it: and here he had

frequently seen her in the height of her feeling give way to paroxysms of sorrow at the disappointment of her hopes. He was aware that during the nights when the moon was brightest her habit of walking alone had been so constant, that her absence from the drawing-room would pass unobserved, and he knew that she would think this likewise. It was therefore that he named this place and hour.

It had been by watching her during these evening strolls, that he had discovered this to be her place of resort on these occasions; and many a time and oft as he had observed her, and heard her apostrophise the moon, and admire aloud the surrounding scenery, and then apparently contrast it with the noise, and revelry, and nonsense within, had he been tempted to break in upon her solitude, in the hope of becoming a partner in the thoughts which occupied her, and which were so powerful as thus to embody themselves almost unconsciously into words. But there was in these moments alway something so sad, so solemn, so almost sacred, in the retirement of a creature so young and beautiful into her own thoughts, such a shaking off of everything that was earthly in the sorrow to which he had here seen her resign herself, that even the bold heart of Leslie quailed at the idea of intruding upon her; and the dread that his appearance might prevent visits which might at some future period afford him the opportunity he so anxiously wished, had hitherto induced him to confine himself merely to observation. This had, however, sufficiently apprised him of the state of her heart and feelings (for here she gave unrestrained way to their influence), to enable him to work upon them in his conversations at other moments.

The spot thus selected by Agnes as the solitary temple of her sorrows, had, alas! been one of those which had been the scene of her pleasures in the early period of her marriage. Its beauties had struck her on her first visit to Trevor Hall, and it was there that she had then realized many of her anticipations of happiness with her husband. It was there that he had joined with her in her enthusiastic admiration of nature; had read to her, listened to her guitar, or sat with her in all the silence of pleasure, lulled into a forgetfulness of every thing but themselves and their present happiness, by the surge of the wave, as it dashed against the cliff; or by the cascade, as it tumbled down the mountain in the ocean. Had Leslie been aware of this, he would not perhaps have named such a place as the scene of their interview.

The spot itself was far removed from the generally frequented parts of the park, being at the back of one of those large plantations which had grown for ages on the brow of a hill overlooking the sea. A small lawn was here overshadowed by the high trees by which it was surrounded, and the care that, by the commands of Agnes, had been bestowed upon it, preserved the grass in all its verdant freshness, in spite of its proximity to the ocean, towards which the lawn shelved down gradually; while to the right and left rose the natural ramparts of the sea, from one of which rolled the cascade which Leslie had mentioned in his letter to Villars.

Several small banks of turf, surrounded by flowers, had been created by the command of Agnes; and a small Corinthian temple had likewise been erected in this little arena of beauties, to which there was access only by one or two almost imperceptible avenues through the ancient oaks and elms, which, with their dark foliage, formed a fine contrast with the bright and smooth lawn beneath them.

This was the place selected by Leslie for his interview with Agnes; and it was here, under the bright canopy of heaven, that she, in the consciousness of her own innocence, had consented to see him once before his departure.

On quitting the dinner-table, Leslie had entered the drawing-room, with an anxious and a trembling step, dreading lest the first object which might strike him should be Agnes unprepared for the interview. An agitated glance around the room convinced him in a moment that she was not there, and gave him additional hope of the performance of her original intention.

A large French clock on the mantlepiece told him there was still half an hour to the appointed moment; but he felt that he was becoming too much agitated to pass that half hour in the routine of common drawing-room conversation; and as the different gentlemen came from the dining-parlour, *coteries* of conversation, of cards, or of music, were soon formed, so as to prevent his absence from being observed. He took the first opportunity therefore of quitting the room: he felt that his agitation was at present too great for the presence of mind which he felt to be necessary at the approaching interview, in which he foresaw that he should require the full command of every art of which he was master, lest the too early exhibition of his own violent passions might alarm her, while her own were sufficiently calm to enable her to escape from his importunity.

He determined therefore to pass the intervening time in collecting his thoughts, and in preparing himself for the meeting. In spite of himself, almost for the first time in his life, he found it nearly impossible to control the ardour of his passions, and to resume that *sang-froid* which was necessary to watch his victim, and take advantage of any opportunity that might be afforded. The recollection, however, of some of his favourite phrases and maxims enabled him soon to take the reins of his passions into his own hands.

He walked in the direction of the place appointed, and sought for some temporary relief from the violence and impatience of his feelings in the contemplation of the scene which he hoped might witness the accomplishment of his wishes. He amused, or rather occupied himself in inspecting the environs, to ascertain that there was no intruder, and to make himself perfectly acquainted with the topography of the spot; and by the time he had placed himself on the steps of the temple, he felt that he was "himself again" in every thing, but the anxiety he experienced lest she should not keep her appointment.

It was one of those clear bright nights which but seldom visit our northern atmosphere; not a cloud was to be seen, but the whole sky was studded so numerously with stars, that the head became nearly dizzy with their contemplation: amidst them the bright moon, which had nearly "filled her circling orb," moved slowly, calmly, and solemnly, throwing her white radiance in one large undulating column upon the sparkling waters of the ocean, while its brightness trembled on the foliage of the majestic trees that bowed to the whispering of a warm autumnal breeze.

As Leslie looked around he felt that everything conspired in his favour; the solemn stillness—the bright moonlight—the murmuring of the waters—the distant sound of the music from the house, which at intervals broke upon the ear, all united, gave to the scene that voluptuousness of nature which art can never imitate. All this had little effect upon his own feelings; but he knew from experience the influence it was likely to have on a young and romantic mind, and on a heart so little *usé* as that of Agnes. Leslie was now quite cool, and struck his repeater, for his impatience suggested that the time appointed must be near at hand. "Seven—eight—one—two—three quarters," counted he aloud. "No, not yet," said he, and he almost doubted the correctness of his watch;

but it *was* correct, for no timepiece keeps truer time than a lover's, at least before success has crowned his pursuit; afterwards, Leslie had sometimes found his half an hour too slow. A slight agitation of the trees from the wind made him start in that direction, lest any intruder might be near to interrupt them. All was, however, again quiet.

"No," said he, in soliloquy; "there are no eyes but those of the stars to gaze upon a lover's transports, or to witness a lady's blushes; nothing but the whisperings of the breeze to betray them."

He struck his repeater again, and the hour of appointment sounded; still nothing indicated the approach of Agnes.

"But will she come?" said he again, and a sickness came over his heart at the apprehension which this question created. "Will no intervening scruple, no impertinent conscience, with its whispers of conjugal duty, step in and disappoint me? Yet, no—no," pursued he, "she thinks I come here to take my leave for ever. She imagines me struggling between passion and duty—she thinks she comes to confirm me in a virtuous resolution, and will not fail; the very edge of the precipice is decorated with flowers, and the gulf below is hid by heartsease."

Thus soliloquised Leslie, *sotto voce*, when he evidently heard footsteps fast approching the spot in which the sound came. He rushed in the direction—his heart beating with rapture—his soul all expectation—when, at the entrance to the plantation, he met—not Mrs. Trevor, but to his horror, Trevor himself, in a state of intoxication! Leslie, in his impatience, had approached too near to him to escape; indeed, had nearly seized his hand ere he had discovered his mistake.

"Curse these—winding paths. I've miss'd—my way. Eh, Leslie! why—what brings you here, man?" stammered Trevor.

This question set Leslie's fears that his intrusion was intended at rest. Curses rose to his lips, but prudence repressed them.

"Oh, nothing—nothing but my love of solitude and scenery," replied he.

"Love of solitude and scenery—no—no," said Trevor. "I don't believe that—they are no loves of yours. 'Tis some woman—some intrigue now I know—some damned intrigue; and you are playing me false."

"Playing *you* false!" exclaimed Leslie, alarmed at this speech, from his own consciousness of its truth.

"Yes, Leslie, for not confiding in me. Are we not brothers in arms? Come now, tell me who it is: you know me too well to imagine I would interrupt or betray any thing of the sort," hiccuped out Trevor.

"No—no—not now for heaven's sake!" exclaimed Leslie, impatient for his departure, and fearful that Agnes might hear him, and retreat without granting him the desired interview.

"Let me see," said Trevor, with that obstinacy which sometimes characterises drunkenness, "who have we in the house? There 's Lady Freelove—no—no—it isn't her. There is——"

"Nay—nay—you shall know all to-morrow—all—all—but begone now!" again exclaimed Leslie, almost in a passion with his impatience.

"If she is a married woman," continued Trevor unmoved, "you may tell me safely; and her husband shall never be a jot the wiser."

"No—no. In this instance I trust the husband never will be a jot the wiser," said Leslie. "But begone, or you 'll ruin all."

"And if I go, you will ruin——"

Leslie, at this moment thinking he heard a noise among the trees, and that he caught a glimpse of female drapery, seized Trevor, and forcibly urged him to the other side of the lawn: during which operation, the remembrance of his own object in leaving the house seemed to recur to Trevor's mind, and he uttered an indistinct inquiry if Leslie had seen any thing of Lady Flora?"

Leslie saw the whole affair in its right light in an instant; and declaring that he had seen Lady Flora quit the terrace in the front of the drawing-room, and direct her steps towards an aviary in quite a different part of the park, he contrived, to his great joy, to get rid of the unwelcome intruder. Still, however, there was no appearance of Agnes; and he began to fear that she had indeed come during the unexpected visit of her husband, and had been frightened from her purpose.

Agnes, in the mean time, sat anxiously in her dressing-room, still irresolute whether she should keep or break the appointment. Her consciousness of the rectitude of her intentions could not hide from her a deep sense of the impropriety and danger of the step she was about to take. Yet

she saw no other method by which she could urge the necessity of Leslie's departure, and secure his obedience to her wishes, unless she made a confidant of her husband, and accomplished them through him. This was a scheme, however, too pregnant with danger for her to think of; and yet it was the only one she ought to have pursued. No consideration for a husband's safety should, in a wife, induce the concealment of any thing prejudicial to his honour.

As Leslie watched the progress of the clock, impatient at the slow progress of time; so Agnes watched the *pendule* on her chimney-piece with precisely the contrary feeling. She wished for the power of arresting its progress; she wished that the appointed hour which called for her decision might never come. As minutes had appeared hours to Leslie, so did the intervals between the quarters of each, by her timepiece, appear but as moments to Agnes. As the time approached, her agitation increased; and as she counted it at last striking the hour as though it had been her knell, every stroke of the clock went to her heart, and she almost gasped for breath. For a moment she determined to break her appointment; and threw herself on the sofa in a vain attempt to calm her agitation.

As minute after minute rolled on however, she again began to hesitate. Imagination pictured the agony of Leslie; she bethought her how involuntary had been his crime, and that it was no fault of his that it had come to her knowledge. His forbearance, his respect, his prudence, through the long series of months that this passion had been preying upon his heart—for the discovery had been made in such a way that could leave no doubt upon her mind as to the strength and sincerity and duration of his affection—gave her confidence in his honour. The idea that her influence might confirm him in the resolution to leave her, not unmixed, perhaps, with the hope that an interview might in some measure soothe his agony, without compromising herself, all rushed upon her thoughts at once, and overturned the resolution she had almost taken not to attend her appointment. It was now nearly a quarter past nine. She seized a new Cashmere, that had arrived from town that very morning, and which had been ostentatiously displayed by Flounce over the cheval glass—again hesitated—then hastily wrapping it around her as though fearful of her own resolution, she hurried through

the casement that opened into the terrace, and hastened to the place of rendezvous.

The beauty of the night—the brightness of the moon—the myriads of stars were unheeded by her. Every thing was calm without, every thing turbulent within. Her heart palpitated, so that it almost impeded her progress. All her senses seemed to have derived an additional degree of acuteness. The falling of a leaf, as she passed through the trees, appeared to her imagination almost like a peal of thunder. She felt that if she suffered herself to think, she should even now turn back—and she did not think.

The impatient Leslie was pacing the lawn with rapid strides, cursing Trevor for his disappointment, and almost ready in his passion to dash his head against the trees; for he had given up all hopes of her coming. When he heard her approach, he rushed to the entrance from the plantation, and was doomed this time not to be disappointed.

Breathless from his late agitation, and from the quick transition of his feelings, it was some moments before he could utter a word. Agnes herself trembled too much to break a silence, which was only interrupted by the beating of their hearts.

At their first encounter, Leslie had seized her hand; and she had, almost unconsciously, permitted him to retain it. At length, in that whisper which is so indicative of high-wrought passion, he exclaimed—"My sweet friend, this is indeed kind! How shall I be grateful enough for this goodness—how shall I repay your confidence?"

"Oh! Sir Robert Leslie," Agnes replied, with trembling, "Nay—nay—release my hand."

"How can I, when it trembles so," said Leslie. "Repose with confidence on my arm—tranquillize your spirits."

"Presently—presently," replied Agnes. "Pardon this agitation. Do not think ill of me, Sir Robert, for thus complying with your request——"

"Can my sweet friend—can Mrs. Trevor think me so ungrateful," interrupted Leslie. "Rather let me thank you on my knees for your condescension."

"Oh! no—no—no," exclaimed Agnes, as with both hands she prevented his assuming the attitude his words threatened. "Let me collect my scattered senses. You must leave me."

"Leave you?"

"Yes!" pursued Agnes. "Accident has betrayed that

which I ought never to have known; but knowing it—it would be a crime to encourage your presence. I came here merely to claim your promise of quitting me for ever."

"Quit you!" exclaimed Leslie. "Well—I must bow to your commands; but tell me—oh! tell me where is the necessity for an exertion that must destroy me. My feelings are unsuspected by the whole world. You are uninfluenced by them, excepting in the kindness of your pity. Can you not depend on a discretion which has preserved the secret even from you for months? Can you doubt the prudence which has hitherto kept down feelings, the fervour of which has almost broke my heart?"

"Oh!—no—no—no," replied Agnes, with increasing agitation. "But my honour—my peace of mind—require it."

"Nay—nay; but none—none—will know it," said Leslie.

"Oh!—yes—yes, there will be *one;* and my own consciousness would imagine the truth in every eye that looked upon me—would interpret every observation into a sneer, and transform the smiles of friendship into those of pity or of scorn—" and her voice faltered still more.

"Nay—nay—my sweet friend;" and Leslie, who had not relinquished her hand, drew her closer to him; "this is indeed too fastidious; this is unlike yourself, to sacrifice so much to a foolish and a heartless world. Think upon all I have suffered—all that I must suffer. Recollect that accident alone betrayed the knowledge of my passion!"

"Hold Sir Robert Leslie!" and Agnes spoke with more energy than she had yet exerted; "it is true, I do owe this unhappy knowledge to accident. That was neither your blame nor mine but for you to speak it is insult—for me to listen to it is crime."

"Nay—nay;" and Leslie's passion got the better of his *sang-froid;* "Can that be crime which is the impulse of the heart! Can that be deemed insult which is the emanation of the purest passion, and which has been engendered by the contemplation of goodness and loveliness pining under the undeserved neglect——"

"Sir Robert Leslie, I will not hear you!" exclaimed Agnes.

"Nay," pursued Leslie, "but your husband——"

"Is your friend, and trusts you," interrupted Agnes. "I came, Sir Robert Leslie, relying on your letter; to confirm you in a virtuous resolution: keep it, Sir, for your own sake

—for *mine*"—and her voice again became tremulous. Her energy was gone, and Leslie felt it.

"But Agnes"——and he would have proceeded, but she drew herself up in a moment, and with dignity interrupted him, by saying, proudly, "Mistress Trevor, sir, that is my name, and it shall never be disgraced by me. Leave me—permit me to depart: I have done wrong—I feel it; but leave me—leave me, sir, to the bitterness of my repentance and my tears;" and Agnes wept.

Although she had begun this last sentence with firmness, her voice sunk into womanly tenderness at the conclusion; and as she uttered the word "tears," Leslie felt the burning drops of them on his hand. He felt also the advantage he had gained: he could not doubt but that there were feelings for him struggling in her heart; and calculating upon what he had met with in other women, he determined to persevere.

"Tears—tears—my sweet friend: what occasion is there for tears," exclaimed he, "where all may be smiles: the involuntary knowledge of my love is no crime in you: my attention to others will blind the world——"

"And what will blind my own conscience?" exclaimed she, with agony. "Go, sir; and if to have added another pang to an already suffering heart can be a triumph, enjoy it—it is yours."

"Nay—nay—" and he drew her more closely to him.

"Unhand me, I insist—I implore——"

At this moment, the tread of heavy footsteps approaching alarmed them both. Agnes, in an agony of terror, heard her husband's voice, and would have fled, but that her feet seemed to refuse their office: she could only reach the steps of the temple, on which she sank, exhausted and fainting, while Leslie still preserved sufficient presence of mind to intercept Trevor at the entrance of the lawn.

He had sought in vain for Lady Flora—had returned to the dinner-table, swallowed three or four more bumpers; and then not finding her in the drawing-room, and still imagining that she was expecting him, had again unconsciously wandered towards the lawn where he had left Leslie.

Leslie's passions were at their height: the scalding tear upon his hand had acted like lightning; the dominion of his lust was upon him; he had touched Agnes; touched her while his heart and mind were bent on her possession; and the collision had set his senses in a blaze. He seized Trevor's

arm with an energy that almost startled him out of his intoxication. He felt that he could have dashed him from the precipice into the ocean for this interruption, and would have done it, but that, amidst all the frenzy of his passion, he recollected that by making her a widow, he should cut off every hope of possessing Agnes, excepting as a wife.

It was the peculiar characteristic of Leslie's mind, that in the very height and tide of his feelings, his coolness and calculation seldom forsook him.

To Leslie's fierce question of what brought him there again, Trevor stammered some excuse about Lady Flora, which Leslie was not sorry that Agnes should hear.

"My dear Leslie," said he, "I beg your pardon; I did not mean to intrude; but somehow or other—curse me if I can find Lady Flora—I mean, I can't find my way:" and then, for the first time seeing Agnes, "Eh, oh! she is come; Leslie, you are a lucky rogue; I beg your pardon;" and then approaching Agnes, who had just sense enough to wrap herself up closer in her shawl, he continued, with a bow that almost sent him prostrate, "Madam, I beg ten thousand pardons."

"'Sdeath, man," said Leslie, "away with you; as a man of honour, as a gentleman, away with you instantly, and be contented with the mischief you have done."

"But I say, Leslie," pertinaciously continued Trevor, "the lady 's ill; perhaps I can be of service;" and he again turned towards Agnes with "I beg ten thousand pardons," but was whirled round by Leslie. "You want nerve, Leslie, you do, indeed; let me see the lady to the house. Her cha—a—racter will be quite—qui—ite sa—afe with me. I 'll keep the secret as religiously as though it were my own."

"Away, away, Trevor," said Leslie, quite conquered by his feelings, in a voice of suppressed passion, "unless you wish to quarrel with me; and by G——, that must and shall be the case if you stop another instant."

"I 'm off, my dear fellow—don't be in a passion—I am off," said Trevor, and he reeled towards the plantation, and went in the direction of the house, muttering to himself, unheard by Leslie, "Hem—does n't want me to know who she is; but I marked the Cashmere shawl—white and silver—thanks to the moon—and shall soon find out the wearer."

The moment Trevor was gone Leslie rushed towards Agnes. But she was already upon her feet, supporting herself on one of the pedestals of the temple, before he could

reach her. One hand rested on the balustrade, while the other was lifted up to heaven. Her countenance was upturned in the same direction. Every thing was motionless about her except her heart and lips; the one beat tumultuously, the others moved in some inaudible prayer. As the white light of the moon fell only on the outline of her figure, making her pale face paler, and glittering on the drapery of her shawl, she appeared more like a statue of the purest alabaster than a human creature.

Leslie was struck with her unearthly appearance, and paused as he came near her. She was, however, sensible of his approach, and receding from him, forbad him again to touch her, exclaiming, "Oh! why, why did I consent to come? I deserve it all—all that can come upon me for this guilty imprudence; and I pray Heaven to enable me to endure my punishment with fortitude."

"Nay, nay," replied Leslie; "all is safe—all are in ignorance."

"Except my own heart and conscience," said Agnes, solemnly; "they are not ignorant; and Heaven grant me patience to endure the agony of the one and the bitter reproaches of the other!" and she moved away.

"But hear me—hear me;" and Leslie would have advanced towards her.

"Nay, Sir Robert Leslie, follow me not; I insist, I command that you approach not one step nearer, and that you permit my passage to the house I ought never to have quitted:" and Agnes spoke with a firmness that she had not hitherto exhibited during the interview. "I have not the power to forbid you my husband's house, because it would betray your secret, but, Sir Robert, if that manly generosity for which I have hitherto given you credit, really exists in your heart, you will never increase the bitterness of my repentance by the continuance of your presence."

The tone of voice, and the whole manner of Agnes, was now so collected and so firm, that Leslie saw all hope of again rousing a feeling in his favour was at an end, and his heart bitterly cursed Trevor. All he could now do was to secure his forgiveness.

"Any thing, every thing you require shall be done," said he. "only let me so manage it that I may run no risk of compromising your honour."

"Nay, Sir, never mind me, my honour can defend itself," said Agnes.

"God forbid that I should doubt it," replied he.

"Permit my free passage, Sir Robert Leslie," again demanded Agnes, for he stood directly across the path which led to the house.

"Let me but convince you that the results of this interview were not premeditated—that if I have erred, it has been only through the uncontrollable impulse of the moment, and not in the premeditated intention. Breathe but my forgiveness before you go, that my heart may not be left to the agony of bearing your displeasure, and I will be any thing and every thing you wish to make me." As Leslie said this he made way for her to pass. Agnes was nearly exhausted by the energy with which she had uttered the few last sentences.

"Sir Robert Leslie," said she, "I do forgive you—would to God I could forgive myself!"

This was uttered in a voice so tremulous that it again encouraged his hopes; he advanced towards her, but she was already gone: and he only caught a glimpse of her white drapery as with her little remaining strength she threaded the dark labyrinth of the trees in her flight towards the house.

Leslie knew that it was in vain to follow her, and he rushed down to the sea, there venting his hot and ungratified passions in curses both loud and deep against Trevor, himself, Agnes, and the whole world.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE CASHMERE.

Lie begets lie.—One evil is sire to another.
AXIOMS.

AGNES stopped not till she arrived in her dressing-room. She entered, as she had quitted it, through the French casement of her *boudoir*, which opened on to the terrace, and, fortunately, unperceived. The moment she found herself in safety, she hastily turned the key in the lock of the door, and throwing off her shawl, sunk on her knees by the side of the sofa in an agony of tears. For several minutes she was overcome almost to fainting, but in some degree relieved of the full measure of her feeling by her tears; she buried her face in the cushions, as though she was ashamed that it should see the light.

For some time she continued to sob in an agony of grief. Her heart seemed ready to break with its palpitation. She lifted up her streaming eyes to heaven, and attempted to pray. But the attempt died away in undistinguishable sounds. She felt that she had anticipated in Leslie's sin—that her own heart was not entirely innocent—that her own feelings had not been entirely untouched—the fire of unholy love had been kindled in her veins, and however it might be concealed from others, to her own heart she could not but acknowledge the secret guilt. True, she had resisted—true, she had triumphed over the momentary feeling—but it had been there, and it had left its traces. It was not extinguished—and it might rise again. Even now her soul was in tumults, and she could not—she dared not pray; she could not—she dared not think:—all she could do was to weep—and sigh—and accuse herself of her involuntary crime. It was in vain her husband's glaring neglect and open infidelities arose in her

mind; she considered them as no apology. Nothing could allay the pang of bitter repentance that shot through her heart as she recollected the feelings by which she had been agitated during the last hour. She was compelled with agony to acknowledge, that, unknown to herself, she had been harbouring a guilty passion under the semblance of friendship. She could not deny to herself that she loved Leslie: the truth burst upon her with all the horrors connected with such a feeling in a virtuous mind, and she again gave herself up to the agony which this thought created.

Suddenly she was disturbed by a knocking at the door of her *boudoir*, and with breathless anxiety she heard her husband's voice demanding admittance. Surprised at so unusual a circumstance, and conscience stricken, she remained a few seconds motionless—uncertain how to act. Terror dried her tears. Could he have known her? Was he come to reproach her? were questions naturally suggested to her mind. How to act! what to say or do! she had no time for reflection. A second summons louder than the first, forced her from her dressing-room to the door, and she almost determined on her knees to confess all, and to entreat forgiveness; so entirely at this moment had she forgotten all her husbands wrongs towards her, so completely occupied was she with her ideas of her own guilty feelings, and with her repentance.

The sight of Trevor, still under the influence of wine, and laughing, soon set her mind at rest with regard to any discovery he might have made.

"Why, Agnes, you are quite barricadoed," said he, "and as difficult of access as an eastern queen."

"I am ill—out of spirits—unfit for society—and—I thought a few hours' quiet might restore me," stammered Agnes, again betrayed into a half falsehood.

"You are right, my love," replied Trevor, "they do make a confounded noise with their music below; those eternal Miss Digginses are come, and have done nothing but play duets with each other, loud enough to stun anybody; and that sentimental Miss Tinkler, with her Italian master *Da Capo* and their guitars, really wear one's nerves threadbare. I wish to God their fathers, and uncles, and cousins, had been freeholders in any other county than this."

Agnes silently assented; greatly relieved from her fears, but still utterly at a loss to know the meaning of such an unusal visit, and still afraid to inquire.

Trevor at length, seeming to recollect something which his description of the people in the drawing-room had for a moment put out of his head, burst into a violent fit of laughter.

"Oh, Agnes! such a discovery!" said he, "such a discovery about our friend Leslie!"

Agnes trembled, turned paler than before, and could scarcely prevent herself from falling; the influence of the wine was, however, still too potent to permit Trevor to observe her agitation.

"A discovery!" she faintly articulated.

"Yes—a discovery! I know you always supposed Leslie attached to somebody; and that you were curious to know the object," said Trevor, "and I have found it out."

Agnes felt nearly ready to faint. Had he really discovered her? She knew that she could resolve this question in a moment by a single glance, but her consciousness took from her the power to look in his face.

"Ha! ha! ha! Poor Leslie! He certainly is in for it—as we say on the turf: madly—desperately in love—ha! ha! ha! It is really quite delightful to see the knowing ones sometimes taken in themselves. Now I have heard him swear a hundred times that none of your sex could make him feel. But by his behaviour to-night, I apprehend he has found the contrary—ha! ha! ha!"

Agnes was by this time at ease with regard to his knowledge of her; but the subject filled her with terror and disgust, and she roused her energies to try to persuade Trevor again to leave her to herself.

"But, Mr. Trevor—Charles—what is this to me?" asked Agnes.

"Oh! I have often observed your curiosity on the subject," said Trevor, "and I now come to give you the opportunity of gratifying it. I owe you something, my love, for the present of your portrait." Agnes shuddered, and again felt faint.

"Well—well, but not now, some other time—my head—" she had almost said her heart—"aches, and I am unfit for any thing but my pillow. Pray—pray, leave me; and you, too, Mr. Trevor, I am sure you would be the better for a little repose."

"Why, to be sure," said he, "these confounded free holders do make one drink: and my head certainly does not

to my own feelings, appear quite stationary: so answer me only one question, and I will leave you—Who is there among our guests that has a white Cashmere shawl, worked with a silver border?"

The question was so sudden, so unexpected, that Agnes quite started; and merely repeating his words—"a white Cashmere, with a silver border?"—could say no more. Her eye almost unconsciously wandered round the room with a glance of terror, lest the tell-tale garment might be visible; but the equivocation which would have rendered her knowledge doubtful, or the falsehood that would have denied it, died on her lips.

"Yes," repeated Trevor, "a white shawl; a Cashmere, I should think, with a deep silver border; I should know it anywhere."

Agnes recollected with terror the conspicuous appearance of the shawl, and inwardly condemned it to destruction. At this moment, what was her horror at seeing Flounce enter from the dressing-room, with which one of the servant's staircases communicated by another door, carrying the Cashmere in her hand, which she was in the act of bringing to her mistress, to exculpate herself from the blame of some dirt and stains with which it was sullied, and to wonder how they could come there; but struck with the unusual circumstance of her master being in her lady's *boudoir*, she was hastily retreating, when Trevor catching a glimpse of the shawl, rushed across the room, and stopping her, exclaimed, "By my soul, the identical shawl! Flounce—Agnes—whose shawl is this?" demanded he, in a half-passionate tone—the idea which passed through his mind having sobered him in a moment—"answer me instantly; for I am certain it is the very same I was inquiring for, and that I saw this evening worn by the person who was with Leslie."

Worlds could not have drawn a syllable either of truth or equivocation—of confession or extenuation—from the lips of the almost insensible Agnes. But Flounce, though only let enough into Leslie's secrets by La Tour to make her suspect much more than actually existed, with the true tact of a waiting-maid, saw how matters stood in an instant; and without the slightest hesitation, fell upon her knees to her mistress, and entreated her forgiveness.

Agnes knew not her meaning; yet she mechanically asked, "For what? What have you done?"

"Oh, ma'am!" replied Flounce, pretending to weep, "I am sure I meant no harm, and intended to take the utmost care; but I thought the new shawl so very beau--beautiful, that I took it down to the steward's room to show the other ladies'-maids; and--and--"

"Well; can't the girl speak without all this fuss?" exclaimed Trevor, "and can't you stand upright?"

"Oh dear, yes--I will, sir," answered Flounce, "but you put me out." She arose; the little interruption, however, instead of "putting her out," had given her time to invent something that might perchance help her mistress out of the dilemma in which she imagined her to be placed.

"And so, ma'am," continued she, "a walk being proposed, because it was so beautifully moonlight, silly I must needs put on the beautiful new Cashmere. Oh! I know it was very wrong, sir."

"Go on," said Trevor.

"So, in the great grove, sir, missing my companions, sir," pursued she, "and wandering about to find my way, who should pop upon me, but--but--Sir Robert Leslie, who I believe took me for somebody else; for--lady--somebody--" she added this, lest the other very indefinite description might be misconstrued as applying to her mistress; "and in escaping from him, the shawl got dirtied, and I am afraid--afraid spoiled." In this she stumbled on the truth.

This to Agnes, who knew the whole to be such a complete fabrication, seemed to be so improbable a tale, that she could not for a moment imagine that it would be believed by Trevor; indeed, she scarcely wished that it should; and during the time Flounce had been telling it, she had been summoning up the whole remaining strength of her mind to meet the consequences of the discovery.

The sudden and impromptu manner, however, in which the tale had been invented and told by Flounce; the circumstance of her having entered the *boudoir* with the shawl hanging on her arm, and evidently looking at the stairs with something like fright and annoyance; conspired, with the utter improbability of its being Agnes herself that he had seen, to convince Trevor of its truth.

"Then it was you after all, that--that was with Sir Robert Leslie?" said he.

"Yes, sir," said Flounce.

"And did you see nobody else?"

"There were one or two others, sir," replied Flounce, "but I was afraid to look up; I believe they were tipsy, sir." This reply silenced his questions on this point: he continued his catechism, by asking who was her first companion.

Here Flounce hesitated; she knew that her falsehood might be betrayed, if she mentioned any of the female attendants; not one of whom could she trust with this deception of her master without, in some measure, implicating her mistress.

Trevor repeated his question—Flounce hung down her head, attempted or pretended to blush, and stammered out in a hesitating voice, "Mr. La Tour, sir."

"La Tour! hum—like master like man." This he half muttered to himself: then feeling that the effects of his wine must have been perceptible in his conduct, he apologised to Agnes; conjured her not to mind the people below, but retire to bed; and finishing, by saying, that "it would be a good laugh against Leslie;" and casting a sly look at Flounce, he withdrew.

The moment he was gone, Agnes, without noticing Flounce, who was waiting all expectation for some signal of approbation, rushed into the dressing-room, and locking the door upon Flounce, who had attempted to follow her, threw herself upon the bed in a state of mind more easily to be conceived than described.

Mrs. Flounce, proud of her own exploit, tossed up her head at being shut out, and exclaiming, "Humph! this comes now of not trusting me," went in search of La Tour, to tell him of what had happened, that he might put his master on his guard, as to what he should say to Trevor; and also with a womanish curiosity, to sift out from him the circumstances that had led to the necessity for her interference.

Flounce really loved her mistress; and twelve months previous to this period, would as soon have thought of self-destruction as of entering into any plot which would have the least chance of compromising her. The unbounded influence, however, which La Tour soon acquired over her, united with her indignation at the unworthy treatment which Agnes received at the hands of Trevor, of the whole of whose intrigues and infidelities Flounce had been apprised by La Tour; together with that gradual demoralization of mind and heart which inevitably succeeds a wilful and unrepented lapse from chastity in a woman, had gradually undermined all her early, though never deeply implanted, principles of virtue.

Knowing Leslie's violent passion for her mistress, she thought a return on her part would be but a just revenge on Trevor for his conduct.

La Tour had not studied in Leslie's school for nothing. Like him, he was a complete master of his art; and his seduction of Flounce, both mind and person, had been complete. Devotedly attached to him, and dreading nothing so much as a separation, it was little to be wondered at, that a weak mind should lend itself to any plan that might tend to promote her own wishes, and perhaps conduce to restore the happiness of her mistress. La Tour had given the history of the lives of many couples on the continent, who lived in those unprejudiced countries, surrounded by every luxury, in the very first circles of society, although united by no stronger bonds than those of love. Of one or two of these parties Flounce had had a steward's-room knowledge when they were in England, before the circumstances occurred that had rendered their living abroad necessary; and consequently the account of their pleasures and happiness, and "*position bien respectable dans lasociété*," made a great impression on her mind.

She was not, however, brought to that state which would have wished or promoted the elopement of Agnes from her husband, however indignant she felt at his treatment of her. But, as La Tour said to his master, while he regaled himself with a pinch of snuff, and indulged in one of those usual shrugs of his shoulders which acted like a note of admiration to his sentence, *ça viendra avec le temps*.

Agnes passed her night in tears of repentance, and in vain attempts at prayer. She saw the abysm into which one lapse from sincerity and truth had plunged her, and saw no means of receding. Her only hope was that Leslie, knowing her wishes, would accelerate his departure from the Hall, which, since her discovery of the strength of her feelings towards him, became more necessary to her than ever.

The next morning brought Flounce to her room. It was impossible to pass over the scene of the previous evening without some observation; yet any explanation with a servant was so humiliating, that she knew not how to enter upon it. Any thing else than the truth never passed the lips of Agnes even to a servant; and during all the late circumstances connected with her portrait, or with her interview with Leslie, had she spoken at all, the truth would have been told, whatever

might have been the consequences; but, unfortunately for her, she had allowed herself a tacit concurrence in the falsehood, and trusted that the evils she hoped to avert by it was a sufficient apology.

When she first met the eyes of Flounce in the morning, she felt like a guilty creature; her imagination pictured an unusual degree of familiarity in her look and manner, and she thought there was a kind of inquisitive curiosity, an appearance of having a right to some explanation of the circumstances of the preceding evening.

She felt in her own mind the necessity of saying something to prevent her suspecting more than the truth; and yet her pride, as well as her prudence, made her wish to say nothing more than this necessity required.

She was nearly dressed, however, before a word was spoken on either side, by which time the evidently increased respect of Flounce's attentions had softened her mind, and rendered the necessary task less painful.

"Flounce," she began, "you must have thought the scene of last night very extraordinary; and my permission of your tale being believed by Mr. Trevor, still more so—" she stopped.

"Oh, ma'am! oh, my lady!" said Flounce, "don't mention it: I was never in such a fright in my life: and I'm sure, when my master seized the shawl, and swore that he had seen it worn by a lady with Sir Robert Leslie, I don't know what put it in my head to tell the story I did; but I did it to prevent mischief to you, my lady—indeed I did."

"I am fully sensible of that, Flounce," said Agnes, "and yet I am not certain that it would not have been better if Mr. Trevor had known the truth; and I more than half repent the weakness that induced my tacit admission of the correctness of your tale."

"Lord, ma'am!" exclaimed Flounce, "you don't say so! why there would have been bloodshed and murder, and poor Sir Robert Leslie, Bart. might have been by this time a cold corpse, with a bullet in his head!"

Agnes shuddered, yet she could not but wonder that it was the danger of Leslie alone to which Flounce adverted, without seeming to recollect that her observation was quite as applicable to Trevor.

"True, Flounce," said she, "and in that observation you have explained my only reason for consenting to the deception

you last night practised on Mr. Trevor. The consequences could have been nothing to me personally. Indeed, as far as I am individually concerned, I most sincerely regret that Mr. Trevor does not know all." Flounce stared, and Agnes proceeded—"But, as you say, this knowledge might have had unhappy consequences—consequences with which I should have been reproached—and, for every one but myself, it is perhaps better as it is."

Flounce could not at all enter into her mistress' feelings. In every thing she did she had but one terror, and that was the being found out; and as long as concealment was accomplished, she was not very nice as to the means.

"There is, however, one thing, Flounce," pursued Agnes, "that adds greatly to my unhappiness, and that is, that *you* should have sullied your lips with a falsehood on my account."

"Oh, ma'am! don't mention it, I beg; don't let that make you unhappy, for I think nothing of it." This was said hastily, and with a real good-will towards her lady; yet she felt, from the look of surprise that Agnes cast at her, that it was wrong, and she immediately qualified her indifference to the utterance of a lie by adding, "For I'm sure there is nothing in life that I would not do for such a lady as you are."

"I feel grateful for your willingness to oblige me," said Agnes, gravely, "but shall never tax your duties to me with the utterance of a falsehood. Your crime last night was shared by me, and we must bear its blame together. I am not insensible to the evidence it gave of your attachment, but I do not the less regret its occurrence. I am unhappy, too, Flounce, lest your own character should suffer in the eyes of your master from your having, I think needlessly, said that your first companion was Mr. La Tour. This may create surmises which you do not deserve, and thus some of the evils of this falsehood will most unmeritedly fall upon you."

Flounce coloured up to the eyes; but her blush was attributed by Agnes to motives very different to those from which it arose; and she added, "That it should be her endeavour to rescue her from any odium that this might bring upon her."

Flounce curtseyed—blushed again—looked more confused—but at length said, "Oh, ma'am, don't trouble yourself; for I believe Sir Robert Leslie is going away to-day——"

"Is he? I rejoice to hear it!" exclaimed Agnes, in a tone of animation and pleasure that quite astonished Flounce—"then, indeed, I am grateful to him."

"Lord, ma'am!" said Flounce, in a tone in which despondency was mingled with surprise, "why surely you don't mean it?"

"Not mean it!" exclaimed Agnes, and she was going to explain, but felt there was no necessity to prolong this humiliating colloquy. She therefore dismissed Flounce, who retired with some slight idea that her mistress was not quite in her right senses to rejoice in that for which she imagined she would grieve.

Agnes felt her heart lightened of half its burden by this last intelligence of Flounce; and, knowing that Leslie could not leave the Hall without paying his respects to her, she quitted her *boudoir*, that he might not have to seek her for that purpose, and to prevent the possibility of their being by themselves at parting.

She took up her position, therefore, in the morning-room, although her appearance betokened quite sufficient indisposition to have given her the apology for keeping her apartment; but she thought it safer not to permit Leslie to know the extent of her agitation and sufferings.

She had not been long in the room before she saw Leslie's carriage, with the imperial on the top, pass the windows seemingly in the direction of one of the park gates. Her heart beat quick: he was then in earnest, and the time was come for their separation; and she felt indeed grateful for an attention to her wishes which showed his preference of her comfort to his own gratification: and she now attributed the whole of his conduct the preceding evening to the effect of that sudden impulse which, in her own character, she had so often found irresistible.

At this moment she heard Trevor's voice, exclaiming: "Caught! caught! stole away!" with some other sporting exclamations; and he immediately entered the room, forcibly leading in Leslie in his travelling dress.

"There is a pretty fellow!" exclaimed Trevor, "absolutely stealing away from us—pretending business—a man who does not even know what the word means—who never had any business in his life."

"Indeed, my dear Trevor," said Leslie, "I must go. Business of importance——"

"Nonsense," interrupted Trevor, "havn't I interrogated your fac-totum, La Tour, and hasn't he assured me that it is no such thing? And don't I know that you have no business

with which he is unacquainted? and havn't I asked Lord Turfington and Sir Harry Pointer to meet you, and matched my greyhounds against theirs, and named you the umpire? and hasn't Agnes invited Mrs. Bluemantle with her album for you to write in; and Lady Sarah Langton, and the deuce knows who, who only come in the hopes of a flirtation with you?"

"Upon my word, Trevor, it distresses me to refuse you."

"Then don't distress yourself, and don't refuse me," rejoined Trevor. "Come, Agnes, use your influence. It is some confounded disappointment or *contretemps* (and Trevor looked cunningly at Agnes) that has created this sudden whim; and you, Agnes, must add your entreaties to mine."

"Nay, Mr. Trevor," said Agnes, gravely, and as tranquilly as she could, "if Sir Robert Leslie has business of importance, perhaps we should do wrong to detain him."

"Business of importance! nonsense; I tell you it is no such thing," said Trevor; "his most important business in life is that of tying his neckcloth: and what can be more important to me than his decision in my coursing match?"

Leslie still protested, Trevor continued to insist, and Agnes was at length compelled, by the importunities of her husband, to request his stay, at least till after the visit of Lord Turfington and Sir Harry Pointer.

On this request being made by Agnes, for the first time her eyes encountered those of Leslie; her own were immediately withdrawn, but not before she imagined that she had read that he complied most reluctantly with any thing which he thought displeasing to her.

It is needless to add, that the travelling dress was changed for a shooting-jacket, the carriage ordered back into the coach-house, the imperial replaced in the dressing-room, and the wardrobes refilled with Leslie's clothes; and thus he had attained the object of convincing Agnes how much he valued her peace of mind, and how imperative he considered her commands, without the pain of obeying them.

Agnes almost wept at this disappointment; but she not only exonerated Leslie, but gave him all the credit for his intentions, and consoled herself that a very few days would bring the expected guest, when the necessity for his further stay would no longer exist. Leslie, however, had immediately written off to Turfington and Pointer, who were of his set, under the seal of secrecy, to defer their intended visit, and he again became domesticated at the Hall.

Agnes now carefully avoided being alone with Leslie: her morning rides were always in society, and her evening strolls were solitary. She contrived on all occasions to be so surrounded in the drawing-room, that there was no opportunity for the slightest confidential communication, had Leslie appeared to seek it. This however he did not, but rather seemed on all occasions to respect the wishes of Agnes, though evidently with such a degree of self-denial and of pain, that gained him additional credit for his delicacy and his forbearance.

Day passed after day, and days increased to weeks, without the appearance of the expected guests. Agnes was anxious and uneasy. Domesticated in the same house, it was next to impossible that the utmost care should insure her from not being sometimes alone with Leslie; and it was not in human nature always to resist saying something that had allusion to the peculiarity of his position. It was true she repressed this with an immediate frown of indignation; but she shuddered to find that this indignation existed only on her countenance, and did not emanate from her heart. She once or twice ventured to express her anxiety for his departure; but this she did fearfully, lest he might suppose that she considered his presence as dangerous. Once or twice Leslie did make a faint attempt to depart, but was again stopped by Trevor.

Agnes could not witness the present conduct of Leslie with indifference. She became alarmed at the increasing influence which he obtained in her heart. This made her miserable—half destroyed her excellent temper—rendered her irritable and capricious—till her guests and her husband thought her a changed being. Sometimes she would shut herself up for the whole day in her apartment; then would propose a party of pleasure, in which she would not be content unless joined by the whole of her guests. At length, feeling that her danger was daily and hourly increasing while in the perpetual society of Leslie, she suddenly determined, at all events, to break up the party, and return to town, where at any rate she should not be under the same roof with him. This determination was no sooner made than executed. Trevor complied, because Lady Flora had gone to London to meet her sick husband, and he had given up all hopes of his coursing match. The guests were dismissed with that ease and freedom which modern good society allows; and Trevor Hall was again left to its uninterrupted solitude.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### PROGRESS.

——— ——— Ungracious boy!
Hadst thou been the offspring of a sinful bed
Thou mightst have claimed adultery as inheritance;
Lust would have been thy kinsman, and what enormity
Thy looser life could have been guilty of
Had found excuse in an unnatural conception.
What will this world come to at last?
When those, who should be the patterns
Of all virtue, lead up the dance of vice!
SHIRLEY.

### LESLIE TO VILLARS.

You ask me *si elle est tombée?* Do you remember, Fred, *le rocher tremblant*, which excited our wonder in the south of France? A huge spherical mass of rock, looking as though it had been brought from some Brobdignag golgotha, which you could set in motion with your finger? Do you remember how it trembled at our touch—threatened every instant to tumble headlong into the valley below—and yet, how it righted (as the sailors say) upon its own foundation at last, and became as stationary, aye, and as firm, as ever? Well, Fred, this phenomenon is the best illustration I can light upon of the present state of Agnes. Like this rock, she is on the edge of the precipice; like this rock, she trembles on its brink, and appears on the point of falling into the gulf beneath; and, alas! like this rock, after all her vibrations, she steadies herself again upon her own pedestal of virtue, where she remains motionless, until another gentle impetus, given by your humble servant, brings on a repetition of the trembling.

Thus, unfortunately, you see her heart resembles this phenomenon in its hardness, as well as in its vibration. I wonder if it should so happen that they were both precipitated into

the abyss, whether the resemblance would continue? For you know, Fred, the stone must inevitably be broken to atoms. But hearts are made of tough materials; so I dare say the simile would cease with the fall.

My only consolation is, that the hardest rock has been known to be worn away by the constant dropping of a spring. But what a task, Fred! What philosophy! to let such a passion as mine is work only thus drop by drop, when it is ready to rush out in such a full tide and torrent as would carry every thing in its stream, or overwhelm all in its progress! What an odd passion this must be, that one illustrates thus both by fire and water: now it is a volcano—now a torrent—now burning—now flowing—every thing in nature affords an illustration of the passion. And yet what image is there in nature that can speak the strength of that feeling which these devils or angels, for I really know not by which title to designate them, create in such hot hearts as ours?

Surely we, Fred, could never have derived our origin from that earth—from that clay—which they say—

> Wise old Prometheus temper'd into paste,
> And mix'd with living streams man's godlike image cast.

Surely the clay must have been left out of our compositions, and the electric fluid—the "living stream," have been alone embodied into consistency in our formation. Yet, perhaps, we had better leave out the word consistency altogether. Hadn't we, Fred?

But this woman, who stands trembling on the brink of happiness, and yet fears to make the plunge; who sees, or imagines a pleasure within her reach, and is yet afraid to stretch out her hand to grasp it! What shall I do, Fred, to make her mine, and save us both from that which is scorching us to death?—for I have no longer any doubt that our feelings are mutual. I have no doubt but that her heart palpitates as much in flying from me, as mine does in pursuing her; that her inclinations and passions pull one way, while ideas of duty to her husband—a husband every way unworthy of her, becoming fainter and fainter, are still however strong enough to hold her in the other.

A husband!—tis but an airy title.

> ——————These ceremonies
> Fetter the world, and I was born to free it

Shall man, that noble creature, (or woman either, Fred,) be afraid
Of words—things himself made?
Shall sounds, a thing of seven small letters, give
Check to a prince's will?

For *prince's* read Leslie's will—the last will I have as yet made; and you have my sentiments exactly in these words of old Shirley.

Compare the raciness—the strength—the nerve of these old playwrights, Fred, with the namby-pamby poesy, crow-quilled in a lady's album, and you have a just comparison between the passion with which this Agnes has inspired me, and those which I have ever felt for other women.

This passion is indeed the very element in which I live—the air I breathe: it is the perpetual tenant of my brain, and heart, and soul—if there be such a thing as soul in our composition. It is the main spring of my existence—the *steam* which keeps the machine of life in motion. Nothing is done now-a-days, Fred, without steam. Heaven grant the boiler does not burst before the work is complete, and blow us all to the devil together. Yet I should not wonder: for our passions—I say *ours*, Fred—note that—I say OURS—are in such a state, that the slightest contact must produce explosion. For my own part, I endure a thirst the Atlantic could not quench—a heat that all the snows discovered by Franklin and Parry in the Arctic regions could not cool—aye! heat enough, Fred, to kill a Salamander.

She knows—she feels this; and she avoids the collision: she flies me as an Arab would fly from a leper, or an ordnance store-ship from a catamaran; and yet she loves me. not as women have heretofore loved me, Fred—not with the sensual passion of a Juliet, but with the sentiment of a Desdemona—not with an idea of that which the world calls sin, and which we call pleasure—not a thought out of which all the chemistry of the most rigid moralist could extract a particle of unchasteness; for to be unchaste, is more unknown to her than the workings of the unfathomed centre of the earth. Her mind is so pure she cannot think a sin, much less be made voluntarily to commit it.

Now you and I know, Fred, this is not quite the right sort of love for our purpose; and yet I feel a pleasure in it that I never experienced before. A pleasure, Fred, much of the same nature with that I felt when having climbed some of the highest of the Pyrenees, I placed my foot where mortal

foot was never placed before, and stood the first man upon the accumulated snow of ages, and who had ever been sheltered beneath the branches of those venerable trees. You do not see the correctness of the simile. Ah, Fred! you were always a dull dog; so, as usual, I must enlighten you. Imagine then the mind of Agnes to be the pure snow on some inaccessible apex, on which sin or man (much the same thing) had never left the sully of his foot-print; and imagine me—but I need not pursue it, as by this little preface you must perceive the correctness of the simile, which merely means the happiness of sinning with one who never sinned before. But think, Fred, of the delight of first teaching such a heart as this the real pleasures of love! such love as mine! then think of her struggling repentance, succeeded, as it always is, by sinning again: then the *knowledge* that the sin is pleasure, and the *doubts* that such a pleasure can be sin: till in the confusion of her mind and heart, she mingles sin, pleasure, and repentance, up together, and swallows them all at a dose, under the idea that the one is the corrective of the other.

But you will say the heart of Agnes has been touched before—no such thing. The impression made by that dolt Trevor, was the mere tracing of the finger on snow, to be melted away by the first shower of rain, or the first beam of sunshine; but I, Fred, have trenched myself so deeply in her heart, that I have discovered the rich mine of her passions and affections—that golden ore of her love, untouched by the superficial attempts of Trevor. He may have fledged her pinions, but I have taught her to fly.

Love with him has merely swept over the loose chords of her heart, and drawn forth such unembodied sounds as the lazy wind produces from the unstrung lyre. But I, Fred, have braced the strings of the instrument, and will strike it with a master hand that shall bring forth its richest tones.

Your cry is still, leave her. I tell you, Fred—

> 'Tis more impossible for me to leave her,
> Than for this carcass to quait away its gravestone,
> When it lies destitute of a soul to inform it.

Leave her! why, Fred, it would be the height of cruelty. What! teach a woman to love, and then desert her! Teach her little heart to feel and beat, and not gratify its longings!

Why, Fred, I had no idea you were such an unfeeling brute. Seneca himself would never have counselled it; and old Diogenes would have been ashamed to have thought of it. Do, Fred, if it be only for the sake of appearances, cultivate a little more humanity and feeling. Pray do.

Leave her! so says she; but does she mean it? Leave her, after she has once consented to meet me. Leave her, after the *premier pas* has been taken. 'Tis true, she says—nay, swears—that the interview shall never be repeated; but every one knows the strength of a woman's resolution in these cases. It may require the patent cable of Huddart to get a vessel from the shore—yet once afloat, Fred, we may guide it with a bit of whip-cord. And has not this one meeting set her afloat on the sea of her own passions? The sea of a woman's passions, Fred! think of that. Why her attempt to control them, would be as fruitless as the command of Canute to the waves, not to wet his imperial feet. I suppose the Saxon monarch meant to give a practical illustration, that

Britannia rules the waves.

Oh that meeting, Fred,—that moonlight meeting—my memory never recurs to it without putting me in a fever. Had you seen her, Fred, trembling, palpitating, every vein a pulse; her frame agitated by one universal beating, as though her heart were every where. Had you felt her soft glowing hand; and when nearly overpowered by fright and feeling, for both were on the alert, she sunk almost into my arms—had you, Fred, felt that form as I did, and be cursed or blest (I don't know which) with the memory of it as I am, you would never talk of leaving her, at least till after. Oh, Fred! like that picture of Mrs. Potiphar in the Barberini Palace, I that night thought in the form of Agnes that every muscle seemed animated by a mind; and that every feature, not only of her face, but of every part of her frame, spoke of passion and voluptuousness.

Then again, Fred, had you seen her standing on the threshhold of the temple, looking like its goddess, with her hands and face uplifted to the skies, the outline of her form figured by the silver light of the moon, the moving lips and beating heart, the only things that gave cognizance that she was not the alabaster statue she appeared, you would, as I did, Fred, for once feel

Lifted from earth our low desire.

How deeply did I then curse Trevor for his interruption! Nothing but the fear of making his wife a widow, and thus giving her the claim to my "honourable" addresses as they are called, could have prevented my hurling him into the sea. And had I been sure that there had been a whale on the stand, "licensed to carry one inside," with the certainty of a safe delivery of the passenger, after a day or two's sea-bathing, I would have tried the experiment.

Villars, you once saved my life: if I do not succeed with this woman, I shall curse thy officious interference between my *os-frontis* and the French sabre, that was on the point of making such close acquaintance with my brains. I remember when Napoleon's life was preserved by his guide in crossing the Alps, to fight the battle of Marengo, the general did not reward him till he came back. Perhaps he waited the result, to determine whether victory had made his life desirable, or defeat rendered its salvation a disgrace. And just so, Fred, will I restrain my gratitude, until the possession of this woman has made thy gift a blessing: for if I lose her—but I *will* not lose her; and I have said it, aye, and sworn it; and does not every thing conspire to my success? Is not her maid, the companion of her most private hours, in my pay? And do I not by these means know her most private thoughts—nay, some even of her sleeping ones? And is not Trevor in my toils, and nearly the whole of his establishment in my interest? In the interest of the *generous* Sir Robert Leslie? Oh, gold! gold! I do not wonder that there are hearts which worship thee. Thou art the true Mephistophiles—the true tempter of mankind—the very devil himself.

By my soul, Fred, far removed as avarice is from my disposition, when I see all that I procure by gold—when I see women's virtue, men's morality, grovel for its possession—I really think I shall turn miser: not to glut my eyes by gazing upon the paltry ore, but for the golden keys that I might make of it to the pleasantest pleasures of existence. For where is the woman's heart to which it will not pave the way—where the dressing-room door it will not open—where the Argus it will not blind? Its subtle power is at work in the ruin of Trevor: Flounce by its influence, aided by her passion for La Tour; for the fellow has learned from his master to inspire *la grande passion;* is already wavering as to the

betrayal of her mistress into such a web as she cannot escape from, unless it be my fault. So I think, Fred, I 'll write an essay in praise of gold, out of pure gratitude.

How variously various women must be constituted! In Spain, now, Burgoing says, a woman will sell her honour to a man who is indifferent to her, to enjoy the national spectacle of a bull-fight. A trinket, in most countries, will purchase from some the brightest jewel they have to bestow. Vanity will throw one into your arms ; revenge induce another to succumb to your wishes : while many a slip from virtue has been made from the mere carelessness of its possessor. Yet here is a woman impelled by a more powerful incentive than any of these—her own passions and her own affections —who resists, and struggles, and thinks she has gained the victory over them and over me; and it will require all my address to convince her to the contrary.

She shudders, and suffers as much for the involuntary crime, as she would if she had actually given way to it ; so you see, Fred, the most acute of her sufferings are past, and the pleasure only is to come. The worst is, that while this preys so much upon her mind, it does not leave the body quite untouched. The Worm, Fred, never eats the inside of the rose, without destroying its external beauty ; the grub never touches the core of the peach, without spoiling its bloom. Her eyes have lost half their lustre ; her form half its roundness ; her cheek is becoming sunken and pale ; and I begin to fear, if success does not soon crown my endeavours, that consumption will snatch her from my arms, or sickness render her beauties less desirable. So you see, Fred, that my success is absolutely necessary to the preservation of her health.

Flounce tells me she once overheard her wish herself dead, and that she actually prayed to die. Now this must be hypocrisy, when she might buy as much poison for twopence as would accomplish her wish, without troubling herself to pray for it. When women talk of dying, it must be only a mere *façon de parler;* since, thanks to the glorious constitution of this world of ours, there isn't a garden that does not present a poison, or an ettui-case, or a work-box unprovided with a "bare bodkin" to act as a "quietus" for every ill, and every good of life.

Is it not strange, Fred, that this woman, in spite of his conduct, should adhere thus tenaciously to her duties to

Trevor? Even where husbands have not given half the cause —nay, I am afraid sometimes when they have given no cause at all, except by over-indulgence—we *have* found wives who have forgotten their duties—at least for a short time—quite long enough for all our purposes—have n't we, Fred?

By the by, talking of conjugal affection, if London were ever successfully besieged, and the victorious general, like Conrade, when he besieged Guelpho, duke of Bavaria, should give permission to the gentlewomen of our good city to carry away that which they considered most valuable, I wonder, Fred, how many of them would imitate the Bavarian ladies, and load their delicate shoulders with their husbands.

Imagine, Fred, the fat Duchess of D—— waddling up Piccadilly, with her pale Duke pick-a-back; and gouty Lord S——, mounted on the shoulders of his pretty little wife, ambling down Park Lane; and Mrs. F——, prancing and curvetting through Hyde Park Corner, under the unusual load of our old friend F——; and think of all the fat citizens trotting and justling through Whitechapel, loaded with their lord-mayors, aldermen, and common-councilmen. Imagine, too, the debate in some of the fair ladies' minds between the plate chest and jewel-cases and their *caro sposos;* or, perhaps, quite as natural, imagine their hesitation as to which they should choose, their lovers or their husbands. In some instances, where all the parties are married, as in several cases pretty well known, a mutual arrangement might settle everything; since, by agreeing among themselves each to carry her own husband, many might secure their lovers at the same time. That would be a capital plan, would n't it?

I wonder under such circumstances, and Agnes had her choice, whether she would carry off Trevor, or your humble servant? I am half afraid, her duty fever is so strong upon her, that she would choose him, though it would belie her own feelings and conscience, and though the fellow weighs at least a score heavier than I do. And so good by, Fred;

## CHAPTER XVII.

### ROADS TO RUIN.

LOR. Know'st thou to lead him to his ruin?
LAZ. As many ways as there are paths to hell;
And that 's enow, i' faith. From usurer's door
There goes one path: from drinking-schools one;
From dicing-houses another.

JERONYMO.

IT is extraordinary how many roads to ruin, and how many paths to unhappiness, life presents; and quite as extraordinary, the rapidity with which these paths lead to their different ends when once they are entered. The fact seems to be, that happiness and respectability all rest at the top of the hill, while ruin and misery are at the bottom of it; no wonder, then, at the increased velocity with which poor human creatures reach the latter, in comparison with their attainment of the former.

Perhaps the speediest road to ruin for a man, both of his fortune and of his mind, is that chosen by the gambler; and the surest path to misery, if not to destruction, for a woman, is that which the admission of an unholy passion into her heart presents to her view. In the one, every thing is *impetus* to push him onward—every thing excitement to the continuance of his career; if he wins, it is temptation—if he loses, it is desperation—that leads, or rather drives him on. In the other, the commencement of the path is fraught with terrors; but there are *flowers* in the perspective which too often allure a woman on, till, by plucking them, they wither, and discover to her the blank and dreary desert which lies beyond them.

In these paths did both Trevor and Agnes find themselves embarked. He hurrying to ruin with the headlong fury of madness. She struggling, retreating, and resisting; now seeking relief in the recklessness of dissipation, and now weeping bitter tears of repentance for an involuntary crime

in solitude. Avoiding, by every means in her power, the tempter, yet perpetually finding him in her way; strong in her determinations of virtue, yet weak in giving way to the ebullitions of her feelings. Her mind and heart formed arenas for a gladiatorial struggle of contending emotions, which, though they did not lead to destruction, kept her in a state of perpetual watchfulness, misery, and alarm.

Mrs. Flounce was not behind-hand with her master and mistress in her progress towards the goal which La Tour and her own folly had provided for her. The principles of her virtue had been fast undergoing a kind of decomposition, till her whole mind became demoralised and corrupted. She not only now began to think her mistress foolish to put up with the wrongs she received from her master without that revenge which every weak woman has in her power—a power which only weak women use—but she began to feel the steadiness of her resistance as a reproach for her own lapse from virtue; and she in time became as anxious for Leslie's complete success as La Tour himself, and entered into all the plans and plots which were projected to promote it.

Leslie was right in his idea that the road to complete ruin is galloped over much more quickly by a woman than by a man.

They had all now been settled in town for some time, and had pursued the usual routine of the London season. Agnes had obtained her wish of not being under the same roof with Leslie; but she was still, in spite of herself, almost perpetually in his society. That this might not be the case in her own house, where Trevor brought him continually, she gave few parties, entirely relinquished her opera suppers and drawing-room dinners, and spent very little of her time at home. Yet wherever she was, she was sure to see Leslie. Peter Schlemil never pursued his shadow so pertinaciously, as he seemed to pursue her footsteps. Yet he treated her with such an air of deference and respect—met her frowns and looks of indignation, when their eyes did meet, with such an humble, supplicating glance—that there was no part of his conduct at which she could take offence; and the knowledge of how much this conduct must cost him, and of the sufferings he must endure for the passion she had unfortunately inspired, together with the increasing turpitude of Trevor, softened her heart in his

favour in spite of all the arguments of her reason and of her better judgment. The knowledge that he loved her, was a knowledge sufficiently dangerous to her peace of mind; but the idea of his sufferings created a still more dangerous interest for him in her heart. This, added to the contemplation of his superiority to others—to the false idea she had formed of the congeniality of their minds, aided by the arts of Leslie himself, which reached her through a hundred mediums, soon nursed the embryo feelings of her heart into a passion quite as subversive to its peace, if not so violent as that of Leslie's.

Agnes could not be insensible to this feeling, and it made her miserable. She strove against it—she prayed against it—she determined against its influence in vain; and, unfortunately for her, the only true friend she possessed in the world, Lady Emily Trevor, was in attendance on her mother on the continent, where she had been ordered by her physicians, and whither she had been followed by the persevering and constant Hartley.

This loneliness in the world also unfortunately threw her in a greater degree upon the most pernicious of all confidences, that of her servant. Flounce, in some measure necessarily in the secret of something existing between her mistress and Leslie, from the circumstance of the Cashmere, came by degrees, through listening, and watching, and surmising, to the knowledge of her feelings; all of which she communicated to La Tour, and by him they were transmitted faithfully to his master, who worked upon them and made them the guides to every action of his life.

As Leslie said, her first love had been indeed only like the sound drawn from the lyre by a passing wind; but in this, her second passion, her heart was struck by a master-hand. In the former, only a portion of its powers had been awakened; but in this, the full harmony—the full force of the instrument was brought into play, and every string yielded to the magic of the touch.

During this period, two more anonymous warnings against the insidious designs, and of the dangerous character of Leslie, arrived by the foreign post; and both were unfortunately intercepted by Flounce, who, at the instigation of La Tour, was ever on the watch for any letter in that remarkable hand-writing which nobody could mistake.

One of these was still dated from Italy; the other from

one of the Greek islands. Both warned her against the villany of Leslie; and the latter said that nothing prevented his return to England for the purpose of exposing his real character, but the hope the writer had of finding and rescuing one of his victims from the misery and disgrace which had been entailed on her by his insidious arts.

There was an air of eccentricity about these letters which seemed to bespeak a mind a little tinctured by insanity; but this was overpowered by a pure and right feeling, that would have reached the heart and understanding of Agnes, and, coupled with the correctness of the warning about Trevor, might have put her effectually on her guard against the wily enemy of her peace.

There was also a truth about them, as Leslie was well aware, which convinced him that the writer knew him well, and was perfectly acquainted with certain transactions of his life, which he wished to have been buried in oblivion; and he treasured up this as well as all the invectives against himself deeply in his heart till some opportunity should occur for his revenge.

These letters convinced him that the "Lady of the Lake," as he called her in his letters to Villars, had pursued him to the Ionian Islands, and that the anonymous and mysterious correspondent of Agnes, who had by some means or other been conducive to the catastrophe of his adventure on the Lago Maggiore, was in search of him there, with the view of seeing her righted, or demanding justice for her at his hands.

All these particulars he wrote to Villars, desiring him to be on the alert, and to spare no pains or expense to ascertain facts, and to prevent consequences, which both of them knew were of too serious a nature to be treated lightly, even by such reckless beings as themselves. In the mean time Leslie puzzled his brain as to who this anonymous writer could be, and pursued his schemes upon Agnes with redoubled ardour.

About this period a circumstance occurred which Leslie hoped would have the effect of greatly forwarding his insidious projects. Some "d——d good-natured friend," as Sheridan says, had taken the trouble to open the eyes of the old financier Freeling to the conduct of Lady Flora; and she and Trevor had so often sinned without discovery, and with impunity, that security had made them careless.

It was not long, therefore, before the injured husband obtained sufficient evidence to institute proceedings against Trevor in one of those courts which heal the wounded honour of a husband by pecuniary damages; and a verdict was obtained against him for ten thousand pounds.

In the state of Trevor's personal finances Leslie knew that he would be unable to pay this sum, and he was debating in his own mind, whether, by lending it, he should not complete his power over the unfortunate and misguided man, when, to his astonishment, he heard that the whole sum, together with the costs, had been paid by his wife.

She too, now become acquainted with the ruin of his own fortune, and the incumbrances with which he had loaded hers, knew his inability to pay so large a sum, and knew likewise that the revengeful disposition of Freeling would drive him to every extremity; though writhing therefore under the publicity which had been thus given to her domestic troubles, went to the trustees of her own jointure, which was secured on certain funded property, and never quitted them till she had obtained their consent to the sale of enough stock to pay the whole amount for which Trevor was liable,* and thus released him from the fangs of a powerful and implacable enemy.

Various were the opinions formed and expressed of this conduct on the part of Agnes. Some blamed, and others praised. Some pronounced her wise, and others called her a fool; but all agreed in pitying her for being linked to a man who thus violated every tie that was sacred, and that had not even the decency to keep his derelictions a secret from the world. None knew that, in addition to the other incentives to this act, there was a feeling in her own mind which rendered it a kind of propitiatory sacrifice for that involuntary offence which proved her misery.

During the progress of this trial Agnes had kept herself at home. She could not bear to be seen in public, and pointed out as the wife of the man rendered notorious in the pending action of Freeling versus Trevor. The delicacy of her mind revolted from the idea of any connexion with those engaged in such a proceeding, even though she was only the innocent and the injured party.

Trevor was energetic in his expressions of gratitude:

* Fact.

but Agnes begged only perpetual silence on the subject, and entreated that the whole affair might be buried in oblivion. Trevor vowed repentance, and took boxes at the opera and the French play, in which he was seen every night with Lady Flora, who, become shameless by the recent exposure, seemed to take delight in brazening out the scandal of her conduct by appearing every where in public.

In the mean time, as Leslie had said, the dice were not *always* against Trevor, and thus his ruin, by fair means, seemed too long a process. He contrived therefore to introduce him to a set of desperadoes, in whose society the play was deeper, and the excitement consequently stronger. These were a set of men of ruined fortunes, who had once been gentlemen—who still pretended to the name—and who bullied themselves into a certain grade of society—where, though their character was doubtful, they were tolerated, because there were none who thought it worth while to put themselves upon a par with them to dispute it, or to risk the disgrace of being shot by them.

They were most of them noted fire-eaters, as well as gamblers; and unable to get into the real pandemonium, like inferior demons, they were content to be the presiding geniuses of the second-rate hells, which abound in the neighbourhood of the principal one.

These men are known about town in the morning by their large whiskers, and blue frock coats decorated with frogs. They have a kind of bastard military air, and look like commissaries or storekeepers on half-pay. They always dine at their clubs, there being few private houses of which they have the *entrée*. In the evening they frequent the theatres or the Opera, in black stocks and silk stockings, staring modest women out of countenance; and at midnight they repair to those places where the business of their lives commences in the orgies of the gaming-table.

Several of the most desperate of this stamp of men were under obligations to Leslie, who had the art and the tact to attach persons to him of all denominations; and these were fellows who would sell their souls for the wherewithal to place upon a card at *rouge et noir*, or to enable them to set a hazard on the dice.

From these he selected a few in whom remained enough of their original manners to prevent their creating disgust.

but who were not the less desperate, and introduced them to Trevor as real good fellows.

The life these men had led, their consequent knowledge of the world, the real wit of some of them, and the fictitious or reckless spirits of all, made them not unpleasing companions to Trevor, while their association with Leslie was at once an introduction to their intimacy.

With these men Trevor would drink and play; and, till he was too deeply engaged either in his Burgundy or his cards, to note his absence, Leslie would lend his countenance and presence.

While Trevor was thus plunging deeper and deeper into ruin, both of his mind and fortune, for the one was being undermined as much with wine as the other with play, the passion of Leslie and the feelings of Agnes had increased, till that of the one arose almost to phrenzy, and those of the other amounted to agony.

After the publicity given by Freeling's trial to the infidelity of Trevor, Leslie ventured a little more openly to express his sympathy; and more than once contrived in public to obtain something like a private communication with Agnes. From these, however, she escaped with the same feelings that a bird would fly from the net of the fowler; but not before she had shown sufficient agitation to betray the state of her heart and mind.

Leslie's love was now become madness. It was the master-passion of his soul. He had restrained it till he had nearly lost all power over his actions. His observation of Agnes had led him to believe that nothing but opportunity was wanting to the fruition of his wishes; he believed this to be as necessary to her happiness as his own. He knew that this opportunity would never be afforded by her, and he determined *coûte qui coûte* to make it for himself, and to succeed or perish in the attempt.

By this time Flounce was ready to aid him in any plan that could be devised.

Leslie's prolific brain was not long on determining on what that plan should be; all he wanted was a private interview with Agnes, without fear of interruption; and the rest he left to the influence of her passions, and to his own address. But he never permitted Flounce to know how desperate and how determined was his resolution to succeed.

As Agnes generally returned from her parties early, it

was agreed that Flounce should conceal Leslie in her dressing-room; and though Trevor seldom passed a night at home, it was determined that Leslie should not leave him till he was so deeply engaged in Burgundy and hazard, as to preclude the probability of his return; while a hint to some of his companions, he well knew, might prevent it altogether for the night.

The whole of Trevor's establishment, with the exception of his own valet, and his wife's maid, were domesticated at such a distance from the apartments occupied by themselves, that there was little fear of interruption from them; but to make this still surer, a night was chosen on which all the male part of the establishment had been permitted by the kindness of their mistress to attend a party which La Tour was to give in the steward's-room at his master's house in Audley Square.

These arrangements once made, Leslie's pain was in some degree allayed, and he forced himself to wait the appointed evening with some degree of patience.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE DRESSING-ROOM.

——————— Oh honour!
If ever thou hadst temple in weak woman,
And sacrifice of modesty burnt to thee,
Hold me fast now and help me.
BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

LESLIE TO VILLARS.

FRED, where do you think I write this? Where do you suppose my trembling hand traces these sentiments of a still more trembling heart? But you will never guess. Be silent as the grave; secret as oblivion, Fred, and I 'll tell you—in her dressing-room—in the dressing-room of Agnes. Do not start, and never breathe a word of it even to the winds; no, not though you went up in a balloon to do it. Yes,

Fred, in her own room, and with her own writing materials do I now address you. Let that account for the effeminacy of my paper; for the agitation of my scrawl; and for the incoherency of my letter. I yet scarcely dare believe the evidence of my senses that I am here; and fear to move, lest I should wake and find it but a dream. I am almost afraid to breathe, lest it should all be but a vision, and my breath dissolve it. And yet it is no vision; I am here, and every thing around speaks of Agnes The mirror in which I now see my own face has a thousand times reflected hers. What a tale might it not tell to-night, had it a tongue to utter its reflections!

Now I think of it, Fred, the very looking-glass ought not to witness such a deed as may be done here to-night, and I have half a mind to dash it into atoms, but that would be only to multiply its tongues, since every separate fragment of the glass would bear the same reflection, and be an evidence against me.

What brought me here, say you? Gold, omnipotent gold, and woman's treachery! And yet, Fred, can that be called treachery which would procure the happiness of those it betrays? surely not! And that this maid of hers believes this to be the case, by making *her* mistress mine, I have not the slightest doubt.

Yes, Fred, a woman has brought me here; La Tour gives a *fête* at my house, so that the principal servants are out of the way; the rest never approach this part of the house. Trevor I have left deeply engaged in play with four desperadoes, who have often been of use to me, Fred, in matters of this sort: before I quitted him, I saw enough Burgundy into his brain, and placed enough gold at his command, to insure his remaining there till morning, playing and drinking deeply; and my plans are so well laid, that should any thing happen to make him leave his party sooner, I shall receive instant intelligence by a signal from without. A carriage and four stands at the corner of Stanhope Street; and relays of my own horses, with confidential drivers, are at every stage between this and Dover; ready, if she accompanies me, which I hope, or in case I am obliged to use them by myself. You will guess why; I may be put to this alternative.

Such, Fred, are my arrangements. I tell them to you now, for the increasing fever in my veins will scarcely leave me the power to do so presently. Are they not made with

a master-hand? And here I am, determined, whatever the consequences may be, to take advantage of them: my impatience has driven me here a full hour before my time; and if I did not take these means of allaying it, I really think I should expire before the arrival of Agnes.

I cannot bear to sit unoccupied, and gaze on all that now surrounds me:—the glass in which she has so often dressed—the white satin slippers, lined with ermine, into which she has so often put her "unhosed feet"—the *fauteuil*, on which she must so often have reclined in that sweet negligence which Ovid calls the

**Unheeded bait of love.**

And above all, that white satin dressing-gown, trimmed with swansdown; and the night-gown, white as the driven snow, and yet not whiter than the bosom which it is destined to cover, that hangs so negligently over the sofa before the fire. There is a little boddice, too, by the tissue paper surrounding it, apparently just sent home: a plain proof, Fred, that her beautiful shape is quite independent of those cursed whalebone prisons in which our women are so fond of destroying the best gifts of nature.

Is not all this, Fred, enough to drive one mad—enough to make one's pulse beat as though the blood were galloping through the veins—enough to set the heart and brain on fire? and yet in your last letter you preach caution and patience. Would you bid them be tame and patient who fry in sulphur?

If one's house was on fire, would not one steal the water to put it out? and shall anybody be blamed when he feels his heart—his heart, mind, Fred—on fire, if he take every means in his power to quench it?

Some rigid moralists may blame me; and why, Fred?

**Imagine but a man who had drunk mercury,**
**And had a fire within his bones,**
**Whose blood was hotter than the melted ore;**
**If he should wish to drink, nay *steal* it too,**
**Could you condemn him?**

Certainly not—therefore find an apology for me: for am I not in this state?

Again, you say that I can never succeed with such a woman without the risk of her destruction! But, Fred, remember

that the miser's idol yielded him no gold till he had broken the head off. And is not Agnes my idol? And why do I idolize her? certainly not to knock her head off.——Hark! did I not hear a step?

* * * * * * * *

No—it was a false alarm! My senses are so acute at this moment, that each of them seems to have an imagination of its own. How it has made my heart beat! You don't hear it at Florence, I suppose, Fred? I could imagine Tarquin's fierce bosom much in the same tumult, as he strode from the Roman camp to Lucretia's residence. There is a time-piece on the mantle-shelf, whose perpetually moving pendulum adds to my irritation, by its annoying regularity—I would have nothing regular—and whose tick, gentle as it is, strikes upon my enlarged senses, as though it were the iron tongue of St. Paul's.—I must stop it. I would not have her under any circumstances note the progress of time. I would have time itself stand still, till—— again —— Oh! tis a gust of wind has blown the casement open. You must not mind the rumpling of my paper: at each of these alarms, I have crunched it up, and thrust it into my pocket. I would not deprive you of it for the world; and I should be glad myself to see how I felt and wrote on such an occasion as this, after it is past. It will help our experience, Fred. In the very midst of my most turbulent moments of passion—and you know I have had enough of them—there has always appeared a cool stream running at the bottom of my heart, that has enabled me to think, and calculate, and write—like boiling water, the bubbling is all at the top.

Why has she driven me to this extremity? Why not give me enough hope to make me patient? Surely, situated as she is, treated as she is, and loving her passionately as I do—and loving me, as I am sure she does, in spite of herself—surely she might have found some apology, and have exclaimed with the poet—

> ———If ever after-times should hear
> Of our fast-knit affections, though perhaps
> The laws of conscience and of civil use,
> May justly blame us: yet, when they but know
> Our loves, that love will wipe away that rigour,
> Which would in other passions be abhorr'd.

But she would not, Fred: she was obstinate; and what can I do but force her to her happiness?

How hot my breath feels! The fire is quite oppressive; and the very flowers in the vases seem to fade as I look upon them! Where does that door lead to? Oh! I recollect—to the apartment communicating with those of her husband: in which I remember he told me, when they were first married, they were sometimes wont to sup and breakfast, *tête-à-tête*.—Fool!—Oh! locked on this side! Thank Heaven for that; and the key seems as though it had been long unturned! Hem!—Who shall I thank for that? And this other door—where leads that? Ha! into her bed-room!—it does indeed. I see the luxurious couch, with its splendid though comfortable canopy. How calm and tranquil seems every thing in that chamber, as though in mockery of the tumult in which the sight of it has set my very soul. How many beauties have reposed upon that bed! How many may be there displayed to-night! By Heaven, Fred, I shall want all the hands of Briareus, and all the eyes of Argus, with a sense in every finger and a passion in every pupil, to give me sufficient capacity for all the enjoyment my errant imagination pictures to me. Where shall I hide me? Oh! that curtain. Oh! Fred, Fred, I am afraid we are both sad fellows, of very inquisitive dispositions, and pry into every place where there is a beauty to be discovered, without having the fear of the fates of Actæon or peeping Tom before our eyes. For these gentlemen, I mean Actæon of Greece and Tom of Coventry, both paid severe penalties for this same misdemeanour of peeping. By the by, I believe Actæon is the only instance in which antlers are said to have been placed upon a man's head by the *chastity* of a woman. The custom of our country is very different; is n't it, Fred? Thank Heaven, there are not many modern ladies who would be quite as indignant and unrelenting as the Goddess Diana and the Lady Godiva. For my own part, I think the wife of Crœsus acted a much more sensible part by Gyges—for she only sacrificed her husband. You will say, Fred, that this is no time for jesting—but I cannot help it; I do it in desperation. My mind must surely be made up of the elements of that of Dante, with a dash of Joe Miller in its composition; and I really believe, if I had written Milton's poem, I should have made the tempter introduce himself to Eve with a joke, and put a pun into the mouth of Adam, at his expulsion from Paradise.

Ha! the time is come. I think—yes, I *do* this time hear

footsteps. Be still, my heart. Breath, do not quite desert me. It *is*——Good bye, Fred.

This time, Leslie's senses had not deceived him. It was Agnes; and Leslie had just time to arrange his concealment behind the curtain before she entered the room, accompanied by Flounce, whose furtive glance and evident consciousness would have created suspicion in the mind of any one less absorbed than Agnes appeared to be.

Agnes dismissed her maid almost instantly, and, throwing herself on the couch, seemed to resign herself to reflection.

The couch was so placed that Leslie could not see her face. At first, every thing was silent; she seemed settling herself to repose: but one gentle sigh, succeeded by another, and that followed by tears, soon convinced him to the contrary. A series of broken sobs now issued from her bosom; and she was evidently giving way to some long-controlled feeling that had at length overpowered her. In the midst of this, he heard his own name mingled with that of Trevor; and his heart leaped into his throat as he resisted the impulse this gave him to rush forward and throw himself at her feet.

Her agitation a little calmed, she slowly divested herself of her ornaments, but with the air of one who scarcely knew what she did. Then suddenly clasping her hands, and lifting them to heaven, she exclaimed, "Oh, what a guilty creature I am!" and again threw herself on the sofa in an agony of grief.

As this subsided, her eyes happened to glance upon the mirror—they became rivetted; her tears seemed to be suddenly dried up by burning which suffused her cheek. She saw the curtain move—she gasped for breath—she started from the sofa, and beheld Leslie at her feet.

Unable longer to control himself, and rendered impatient beyond endurance by the delay of Agnes in undressing, he had left his concealment before he had at first intended, relying on the evidence he had thus orally had of her feelings with regard to him, and threw himself speechless and almost breathless on his knees before her.

Agnes was at first paralyzed at the unexpected sight, and seemed to gaze upon him as upon some unreal thing, distrusting the evidence of her senses. She would have screamed, but her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth;

she attempted to move, but her limbs refused their office. A nightmare feeling crept over her, and she seemed fascinated into immobility.

Leslie himself was so overpowered with the long-controlled passion which was now bursting forth, that he could not speak; heavy and audible breathings, and eyes that looked as though they would burst from their sockets, were the only evidences of his existence. At length, in broken accents, he uttered the name of "Agnes!" and seized her hand. His voice and touch in a moment restored her to herself. She rushed towards the door, but Leslie intercepted her in her passage; she turned to ring the bell, and found, to her agony, that the pull had been conveyed out of her reach.

She stood for a moment in mute despair. Leslie approached her, but she motioned him away. At length, she seemed to assume sufficient courage to speak; and in hurried accents and unconnected sentences, she exclaimed—

"How dare you—thus—add—insult to—to—" and then forgetting herself, "how came you here, sir?"

At this moment, the wind again agitating the window-curtain, and Leslie's eyes being attracted in that direction, she exclaimed, "Ha! the window!" and rushed towards it with a precipitance and force that would have dashed through it into the garden, though it was two stories from the ground, had not Leslie fortunately caught her just in time to prevent such a catastrophe.

The eminent risk she had run in this attempt at escape, made Leslie more cool; and as he brought her, resisting with all her strength, from the window, he exclaimed—

"Agnes! Agnes! why this agitation? Would you prefer death——"

"Death—destruction—any thing," interrupted she, "to this unlooked-for insult."

"Nay, hear me; you must hear me. It is impossible for me to live, deprived as I am of your society. Calm this agitation; you are safe—you are indeed, with me—with one who loves as I do," said Leslie; "only hear me——"

"To-morrow! to-morrow!" and Agnes almost screamed these words, "Leave me now, and I will bless you—pray for you!"

"I will—I will," said Leslie, almost inarticulately, "presently: only hear me—listen to me. We both love—nay, it is useless to deny it—we both love to madness—with a

passion preying upon our hearts, and hurrying both of us into our graves."

"Oh, would to God I were in mine!" wept Agnes; and Leslie rejoiced in her tears.

"Nay, but why should we sacrifice the best feelings of our existence to paltry prejudices, which ought not to fetter such souls as ours——"

"Sir Robert Leslie, insult me not; I will not hear you:" and Agnes turned away.

"Can the sacrifice of a neglectful, unworthy husband, be put in competition with such a love as mine? Can the opinions of the contemptible and prejudiced few, weigh against those passions upon which Heaven and nature have set their seals, by the enjoyment they have annexed to their indulgence?"

"Sir Robert Leslie, leave me—I entreat—I command—I implore—" and she screamed as loudly as her strength would permit for assistance.

"Nay—nay—Agnes, the few servants who remain in the house are out of hearing. Trevor, your natural protector and guardian, is away:—all I ask is a patient hearing—and you shall be safe," said Leslie, and he approached nearer to her.

Agnes was sensible of the truth of what he said, and weeping, receded from him.

"Agnes, I love you—love you with a love as devoted as it is ardent. I have loved you from the first moment I saw you, and stifled my passion in my own breast, lest its expression should give offence to the object of my heart's warmest feelings—accident alone discovered it. Your determination to banish me from your presence has only added strength to my passion; while I saw you and conversed with you daily, it was some alleviation to my feelings—but deprived of your society, they have become too strong for me to control—and I am here—to throw myself—my heart—my life—my very soul, upon your mercy! Agnes, I am desperate—but you may govern me. Agnes, I am mad—but you may control me. I love you—with a love surpassing the power of expression ——;" and his voice was scarcely audible in the passionate whisper to which it appeared to be reduced by excess of feeling.

Agnes could not reply. Her tears flowed faster—her bosom heaved convulsively—she seemed sinking on the floor. Leslie

saw and felt his advantage, and caught her in his arms. This action roused her in a moment; she attempted to start away, but he only held her closer to his breast. It was in vain she struggled. Leslie felt her warm breath mingle with his own. His lips were upon her cheek. Her sob became a suppressed shriek—her struggle almost the ineffectual effort of an infant: but as he attempted to lift her from the floor, she suddenly reassumed a portion of her energy, and slipping through his arms, sunk on her knees before him.

"Sir—Leslie—" said she, in a voice which, though only a whisper, was so articulate, that every word would have made its way to the heart of any one but such a man as Leslie. "As a man of honour—for the love of heaven—by every thing that is sacred—I conjure you to leave me—as you may one day have a daughter—or a wife of your own——."

"Never—never, Agnes," interrupted he, "you have so engrossed every feeling of my heart, that it can never beat for another. I have controlled my passions beyond the powers of human nature—I can resist them no longer—;" and he again attempted to take her in his arms.

She struggled violently:—to scream she found impossible—when suddenly, one violent knock was heard, that made Leslie start, and enabled Agnes to free herself for a moment from his arms. The knock was again repeated. It was evidently at the street-door: and for the sound to have reached to that remote apartment, must have been struck with prodigious violence.

The sound seemed to reach to the very heart of Agnes; and Leslie himself appeared to tremble at its repetition, without being able to account for its effect upon him. He stood as Juan did when he heard the knock that announced the arrival of the Commendatore's ghost. The silence, however, which succeeded, gave him time to think; and he had almost concluded it to be the result of some frolic, when hurried footsteps were heard to approach the dressing-room door, and Flounce rushed in, pale as death, and falling upon her knees before Agnes, exclaimed—"Oh! my master! my master!"

"Thank Heaven! thank Heaven! then I am safe," exclaimed Agnes, and sunk fainting on a chair.

Leslie started, and cried out—"Where—where?—by which passage is he coming?"

But the sobs and screams of Flounce were increased into hysterics, and nothing that she attempted to say could be comprehended.

Leslie, apprehensive every moment that Trevor would follow her into the room, unwilling to relinquish his prey, hastily formed a resolution to carry off Agnes by the staircase that led to the garden. For this purpose he unlocked the door leading into the room before mentioned as communicating with Trevor's apartments, and with this private staircase. He was quite fearless of any resistance on the part of Flounce, and knowing his agents all on the alert, he was in hopes while her senses were still so nearly overpowered, that he might succeed in his desperate attempt.

He seized the fainting, and now unresisting Agnes in his arms, and bore her to this apartment. As he entered, however, and approached the door that led to the staircase, he was struck by the sound of a number of confused footsteps evidently hurrying towards it on the other side.

Agnes heard them likewise; and the hope of escape gave her momentary power to free herself from the hold of Leslie. She rushed towards the door; but before she could reach it, or Leslie either prevent her, or retreat, it was thrown suddenly open, and Trevor's own man entered with lights, followed by five or six common looking men, who were bearing the breathless and still bleeding corpse of his master stretched upon a shutter on their shoulders. The cravat had been taken off, and the open shirt showed the wound in the breast by which his death had been occasioned, and which became exposed as they placed the body upon the table.

Agnes started with horror—gazed once upon the pale countenance, from which death had not yet wiped the stamp of those fierce passions by which it had so lately been agitated—gave one piercing shriek, and was borne by the surrounding people back to her own apartments.

Leslie saw that Trevor was really dead—comprehended in a moment all that had happened, and quitting the house unobserved in the confusion, rushed with the feelings of a disappointed madman—first to the place at which he had left Trevor, where he heard the true history of the fatal catastrophe, and then to his own home.

### Leslie to Villars. (In continuation.)

Fred, fate has determined that Trevor should never be a cuckold. The destinies themselves have enlisted in the preservation of his honour as a husband; and rather than he

should live to be brauded with that ignominious epithet, they have actually killed him. Killed him, say you? Yes, Villars, Trevor is *dead!* Don't start; but he is actually dead. Unfortunately for himself, he saw through the arts of those with whom he was playing—accused them of false play—swore the dice were loaded and the cards packed—became very intemperate—struck one of his companions, who happened to be an Irishman and a fire-eater. Nothing would do but immediate satisfaction. Pistols were unhappily at hand: they went out on the instant by moonlight, and the first fire Trevor was shot through the heart. This comes of employing fellows who go beyond their instructions, which is quite as bad as not acting up to them. The officious scoundrel who shot him, and who has been concerned in more secrets of yours and mine than I care for, is on his way to Dover, with the horses I had provided for a very different purpose.

This circumstance in the present crisis of affairs is certainly a most unlucky *contretemps;* and Trevor in his death, has done more to overturn my well-laid schemes, than he ever could have done had he lived a hundred years. I know now, Fred, that you will shudder, and preach that "when death mingles in the dance" 'tis time to pause. Yet after all, what is it? A pang—and it is past—and I warrant you the ball that killed him never gave Trevor's heart a pang so great as that which he experienced every hour of the day that the dice went against him. So you see he is a gainer by the loss of his life. Rest assured, Fred, it makes all the difference in the thoughts of death, whether you contemplate it in those gloomy cellars of mortality, the catacombs where millions of sculls invite the phrenologist to study, and grin upon you with their lifeless jaws by torchlight, or whether you see it, in that gay drawing-room of the dead (*salon des morts*), *Père La Chaise.* That congregation of the illustrious and the non-illustrious—of conquerors and of cowards—of the stupid and the wise of all nations, laid so neatly together, and so compactly placed, that they seem only there to wait to get up and dance a quadrille at the day of judgment.

If such a day there be—IF? Ah, Villars, what a devil of a deal is conveyed in that little word IF! But I am not quite in the humour to joke—and so farewell.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE MARRIED RAKE.

SIR HARRY. Oh, but they say a reformed rake makes the best husband.
LETITIA. Do they?—When I believe the saying to be true, I may perhaps marry you; but till then the wisest thing I can do is to say, Farewell!
COMEDY.

"MARRIAGES IN HIGH LIFE.

"YESTERDAY morning, at St. James's Church, Sir Robert Leslie, Bart., was united to the accomplished widow of the late Honourable Charles Trevor: and at the same time, Francis Hartley, Esquire, M.P., led the beautiful Lady Emily Trevor to the altar. Carriages-and-four were in waiting at the church-doors, to convey both the happy couples to Leslie Hall, where they intend to pass the autumn, and where they will be joined by a large party of fashionables to partake in the festivities of Christmas."

The reader must be apprised that many months had elapsed since the awful death of Trevor before the marriages recorded in the foregoing paragraph took place.

That event had completely foiled Leslie, and overturned every project he had formed. Agnes, free and unfettered, and open to his legitimate pursuit, was, as he had forseen, a very different person from the Agnes united by a wayward destiny to a man every way unfit for her, and pursued by one who loved her with a passion that appeared as ardent as he asserted it was involuntary and unconquerable. The expression of that feeling, and of the wishes it had created, might find an apology for the madness of passion when there were no legitimate means of gratifying it; but the obstacle once removed—a legitimate path being opened, Leslie knew that

there was no hope for him through any other. The very attempt would give the lie to all he had said—to all he had sworn—to all he had urged; and he cursed the violence of his agent, which had led to a catastrophe so far beyond his intentions with regard to Trevor, and which had placed him in such a predicament.

To any other man possessed with such a passion as that of Leslie for Agnes, though he might not at first have rejoiced in Trevor's death, it would have been impossible in a very short time not to have derived a pleasure from the freedom it gave to Agnes: but independently of his hatred of the ties of marriage, Leslie had other and very important motives against his taking such a step at present, as that of leading any woman to the altar. There was likewise a perversity in the structure of his mind, that permitted him no pleasure in the pursuit of any passion that was not an illicit one. Crime seemed necessary to give a full zest to the enjoyment of his senses; and he had hitherto laughed at the sober dulness of that domestic happiness, which he had heard praised by those very husbands, whom he secretly knew had the least right to reckon upon it.

His first impulse, therefore, when his senses became cool, and he saw that his schemes upon the honour of Agnes were overturned, and knew that there was now no possibility of success, according to his own wishes, was to fly from England and from Agnes, and forget in the dissipation of the Continent that such a being was in existence, and that he had ever loved her.

But Leslie had been too much addicted to the indulgence of every whim and passion that had ever entered his mind, to be able to give up even one ungratified. He had never fixed his inclinations on a woman, and uttered his imperious "I WILL," that he had not accomplished his wishes; and feeling for Agnes a sentiment a thousand times more powerful than he had ever experienced before, he found, or believed, it impossible to resign his hopes of making her his. It was in vain he argued upon the dangers of marriage, or upon the absurdity of any other expectation. It was in vain he strove, in the society of other women, to forget her. His inclinations had taken so strong a hold upon his heart, that his passion had become disease; and he felt that were he to fly as far as the Antipodes, the idea of leaving such a power-

ful passion ungratified, and Agnes open to the honourable pursuits of others, would have brought him back again.

During this period, too, he received letter after letter from Villars, dissuading him from venturing on such a step under his present circumstances: and another letter had also arrived, and been intercepted, in the same hand-writing as the preceding ones, still warning Agnes strongly against him, and still accounting for the writer's absence, by his pursuit of some object of Leslie's seduction and desertion. Leslie knew well the circumstance to which the letter alluded, and cursed the officiousness of the writer; while he vowed to be deeply revenged upon this anonymous accuser, should it ever be his fortune to discover him.

Nothing, however, could wean him from his determination to succeed. His passions had been too long uncontrolled to be governed by his reason, and he went on.

Another incentive to his passion, and which perhaps operated nearly, if not quite, as strongly as his own violent inclinations, was the refusal of Agnes to see him. The horrors of the scene in Trevor's room, and of his sudden and unexpected death, had scarcely subsided, when reflection brought to her mind the audacious attempt of Leslie; and she shuddered almost as much at what might have been the event, as she did at that to which perhaps her safety was in a great measure attributable. Her grief, or rather perhaps her horror, therefore, at Trevor's fate, was succeeded by an indignation against Leslie, which it required all his address to allay. It was still however several weeks before his persevering attempts to see her were crowned with success: when he did at length obtain an interview, knowing that she really loved him, he took advantage of this knowledge, and pleaded his cause and his apology so successfully, that he at last wrought on her to believe that every thing had arisen from the excess of his passion; and found an excuse for his conduct in the madness which was the consequence of his love, of her unhappiness, and of the hopeless circumstances of their situation.

It will be easy enough for those who do not love, to blame Agnes for ever again seeing or listening to Leslie; but let those who blame her, themselves love the object who has offended them, and they will find it quite as easy, as Agnes did, to pardon and forget the offence, when the heart pleads for the offender; and when the offence is supposed to hav

arisen from that which every woman views with an eye of favour—excess of love. Agnes was not, like the reader, aware of the real character of Leslie. It should be recollected, that to her he appeared only a romantic and impassioned being, suffering a martyrdom under feelings she herself had inspired, and giving way to them at length only through the uncontrollable strength of a passion which had overcome his reason. All this was no apology for the insult offered to her honour; and she was herself too much involved in her own feelings for Leslie to recollect, that the woman who has once heard sentiments of a dishonourable nature from the lips of a man, should be very guarded in believing those of an opposite tendency, when it is so much the interest of his passion to express them.

The circumstances attending the death of Trevor had made much greater impression, and occasioned much more grief in the mind of Agnes, than his death itself. She was above the affectation of a sentiment she could not feel; and the terms on which she had lived with Trevor being well known to the world, there existed no occasion for the display of much sorrow on the occasion.

Many of her acquaintance, who knew Trevor intimately, indeed considered his death a matter of congratulation; and would have treated it so, even with Agnes herself, had the propriety of her own feelings permitted it.

Though Trevor had never respected himself, Agnes was determined that as few people as possible should have to cast a reflection upon his memory. All his own estate, as he died without children, passed to another branch of his family; so that there was nothing to satisfy his numerous creditors but his wife's fortune, which having been all settled upon herself, was not liable to any of his debts. To rescue the memory of Trevor from as much odium as possible, she discharged every claim that could be made against him, not excepting those contracted in the indulgence of that vice which had led to his death: among these were the sums due to Leslie, the amount of which she contrived to ascertain and to pay in spite of all he could do to prevent it; and it was during the negociation of this affair that he managed by stratagem to gain his first interview after the death of Trevor.

Her forgiveness once obtained, all the other steps were easy enough; and in time they led to the result narrated in the paragraph. This marriage, however, did not take place

without many struggles on the part of Leslie to resist the influence of a feeling which was leading him into a path from which he knew there was no retreating. But this passion was so predominant over every other feeling, that it conquered in spite of all his resistance, and in spite of his better judgment. The moment the irrevocable step was taken, he despatched a courier to Villars, urging him to employ every system of espionage to discover the retreat of those who had now so long and so successfully eluded his vigilance, and who did not appear to have been yet discovered by the writer of the anonymous warnings.

During the last year, Leslie had so conducted himself to the eyes of Hartley and Lady Emily, as to give them such security of his reform, that, knowing the love Agnes bore to him, they did all in their power to promote their union. On the part of Agnes herself, disbelieving all the reports she had heard to his disadvantage, struck by the brilliancy of his talents, the elegance of his manners, and by the apparent devotedness of his love, it was no wonder that she gave herself up to the indulgence of a feeling which was now in her eyes perfectly innocent.

Sir Robert Leslie, as a man quite *comme il faut*, a baronet with a large estate, with a peerage in reversion, was precisely the person Lady Pomeroy would like to call nephew, and that Mrs. Henry Pomeroy would be happy to distinguish by the title of brother: so no wonder that the match met with their sanction.

Lady Emily's hand had been joined with that of Hartley by her mother on her death-bed; and her esteem and friendship were so excited by his unwearied attentions, that they were ripened into that feeling which enabled her conscientiously to bestow it upon him at the altar. After their marriage, Leslie himself was so surprised at the superior degree of delight that he enjoyed in the society of a woman who considered herself legitimately his, and who could give herself up to all those sentiments which he had never excited in others, unalloyed by those feelings of guilt which operated against their enjoyment in the objects of his passion, and lowered them in his esteem, that, for the first time in his life, he felt that he could have been happy, but from circumstances which would still intrude upon his memory to mar his felicity. Still there was sufficient in the full accomplishment of wishes so long indulged, to satisfy even such a mind as his;

and to his surprise, the possession of Agnes had as yet only added to his passion.

Agnes herself was perfectly happy; married to the man she loved; believing herself loved devotedly in return. Ignorant of every thing but what she felt and saw, existence again teemed with every pleasure for her, and she looked upon Leslie as the person to whom this happy change was attributable.

If a cloud would ever come over the sunshine of her happiness, it was when she sometimes observed Leslie to be restless and uneasy, and which was invariably the case whenever he had any letters from the continent. At these periods he would appear anxious and agitated at every knock at the door, and at the announcement of any name to which he was unaccustomed.

But as these fits were only of short duration, and the suavity of his manners soon returned, she regretted them without any suspicion being excited that they arose from any thing more than some temporary annoyance.

Thus month after month rolled on happily with Agnes, and with a strange mixture of anxiety and pleasure with Leslie. At the end of the year, her happiness was increased by the birth of a girl, who created a new outlet for all the affectionate feelings of her heart, by exiting a new affection, and by creating, if possible, that which she felt for Leslie.

He, however, to her surprise, expressed no pleasure at an event so fraught for her with additional happiness; but this being attributed both by herself and friends to his disappointment at the child's not being a boy, which a little time would wear off, was permitted to pass unnoticed.

Leslie's mind and affections were, however, undergoing a rapid change: he had been too much of a selfish sensualist to enjoy any other pleasures long, than those which were centred in self; and the appearance of Agnes as a mother, and in the performance of a mother's duty, had precisely the contrary effect to that which would have been produced on a well-regulated heart and mind.

The pleasures of domestic enjoyment were becoming too tame for him; they were not sufficiently exciting to relieve his mind from some circumstance, the memory and the pain of which, in spite of himself, destroyed his tranquillity. In the society, therefore, of a few of his most select companions, he

indulged in his old propensities; but this was done so cautiously, that it was unknown and unsuspected by Agnes.

About this period, the reversionary peerage and estate fell in; and everybody was surprised at the eagerness with which he assumed his new title of Lord Arlington, and the tenacity with which he determined, except in his own private coterie, never to permit himself to be addressed by the name of Leslie.

Some attributed this to caprice; others to pride: Leslie himself, and La Tour, alone knew the reasons for it.

Leslie was, however, doomed to experience other miseries than those arising from this secret anxiety, as the old tone of his mind returned: with it also returned his old evil opinion of women; and as he still saw that Agnes was all that a man could desire in a woman whom he had not possessed, he began to imagine that she might become the object of other men's dishonourable pursuits, as she had once been of his own.

This feeling of incipient jealousy was so far favourable to the continuance of the happiness of Agnes, that it excited Leslie to keep up all the appearances of devoted affection, and she had then no suspicion of his altered feelings. Among the number of those "trifles light as air," which give rise to jealousy, and which are the mere chimera of a man's brain, begotten in mistake and prejudice, and fostered by a jaundiced imagination, there are none which so prey upon the mind as those which recall to his memory the sacrifices which women have formerly made for himself.

A man who has led a life of intrigue, who has been accustomed to judge lightly of the whole sex, because he has estimated women only by those with whom he has been successful, has a most tenacious memory of the thousand ways in which a faithless wife would make him understand her partiality towards himself; and as from the necessity of concealment this partiality was conveyed by actions too trivial and commonplace, to attract any other notice than his own, he is too apt to misconstrue the commonest actions and words of his wife addressed to others into the evidence of the existence of some secret intelligence.

Jealousy may arise from a number of causes: a man may doubt his power of pleasing, and become jealous from his feeling of inferiority to those who surround him, and whose

superiority he fears his wife may perceive as well as himself. This jealousy arises either from modesty or envy.

The seeds of its baleful influence may be sown by the lightness of a wife's conduct; by a want of dependence on the stability of her principles; or by a fear that other motives than those of affection had induced her to become a wife.

But the worst and most tormenting species of this passion, is that which arises in the mind of the married libertine, who having been accustomed to success with other men's wives, becomes doubly jealous of his own. His memory of former successes becomes his greatest curse; he shudders at circumstances in which he was wont to triumph, and imagines himself the laughing-stock for that finger of derision to point at, which he was once so ready to point at others. Once a husband, he becomes doubly jealous of the chartered privileges of marriage; doubly alive to its violations, and doubly cautious of its invaders: since, like a burglar, who has amassed property enough to make himself afraid of his former comrades, he takes double precaution, since he is aware of all the arts and frauds that are practised, because he has used them all himself. These are, indeed, the men who discover that "it is folly to be wise," and who would give worlds for the bliss of ignorance.

All the former comrades of such a man as this are looked upon with suspicion; old friendships, carried on for years in the fellowship of the same pursuits, are broken up: there is no man who sits at his table, or who lounges in his drawing-room, that he has not known to be a libertine, and whom he does not suspect has the same designs upon his wife, that they have jointly had upon those of others. In short, there is no life more miserable than that of a married libertine; and no retribution more just than that which he experiences in the jealousy which he has so lightly, and carelessly, and viciously, inspired in others.

How, when he sees his wife perform a hundred commonplace civilities, does his memory curse him with the recollection that just so was he treated by the wife of some other during he existence of a guilty intimacy! How does every smile she bestows on his libertine friend cut him to the heart! And how does he shrink from every little jest with which they may choose to taunt him!

These are the true and proper penalties of libertinism.

Let a man therefore never be a libertine; or if he be, let him avoid matrimony. Perhaps the first piece of advice contained in this sentence is the best.

His recollections of the use he had made of the services of Flounce made him determine to remove her from the person of his wife, lest she might be tempted to betray her to others, as she had once been wrought upon to betray her to himself. Of this circumstance Agnes had been kept in entire ignorance, or she would herself have been the first to remove her from her situation with disgrace.

To manage this removal of Flounce, he tried to perusuade La Tour to marry her; but the wily Frenchman, in such a service as that of Leslie, had seen too much of matrimony to venture his own neck within its pale. All that he did when his master read him a lecture upon the necessity of doing justice to the poor girl, and making what is called an "honest woman of her," was to shrug up his shoulders higher than ever, and to say that "Mademoiselle Flounce fut très-bien; mais pour le mariage, ça étoit tout autre chose, et qu'il n'avoit pas du tout l'envie d'être—comme autant des autres," and away went his shoulders again.

Indeed, so constant was La Tour in this use of his national shrug, that Agnes was never called Lady Leslie or Lady Arlington, that it was not immediately put in practice.

At this period Leslie received a letter from Villars, which redoubled all his anxiety. La Tour was despatched to Calais; confidential agents were sent to Boulogne and Dieppe; and every post brought letters from them, all of which were eagerly opened by Leslie, who had the utmost difficulty to conceal the agitation in which he lived.

Agnes, who had discovered some of the incipient appearances of Leslie's jealousy, attributed every thing to the same source, and immediately did every thing in her power to allay them, by increasing the evidences of her own affection and happiness, and by confining her patronage and praise almost exclusively to female talent; for she had thought once or twice that she read something like uneasiness in his eye, when she had, with her usual exuberance of feeling, given way to the praise of men of genius, and so ardently sought to add them to the many attractions of her table and drawing-room. This very jealousy, however, by convincing her of the unabated ardour of his love, perhaps increased the happiness to which the birth of her child had added in so great a degree.

As a wife, therefore, and as a mother, Agnes was completely happy; and she again indulged in all the romance of her disposition, by anticipating the progress and perfection of her infant in maturity, and by indulging in all the fond dreams of a young mother with her first child.

Their marriages had only increased the intimacy of the two friends. Lady Emily had found much more than she expected in Hartley. Every day brought forth some new trait to admire, or the knowledge of some new characteristic to excite esteem. She had never perhaps felt the more ecstatic pleasures of Agnes, but she experienced a more tranquil happiness, and felt that it was grounded upon a more solid basis than the mere gratifications of passion.

Not possessed of the same ample means, and not coveting the power which the fashion of Agnes gave her to patronise merit with effect, but yet having the same inclinations to befriend struggling talent, Lady Emily Hartley, on occasions in which her sympathies had been excited and her aid solicited, had been in the habit of engaging her friend to interest herself in the welfare of any of her *protégées*.

During her residence with Lady Trevor on the Continent, and at that Lady's death, she had been under considerable obligations to a noble family at Florence, a sense of which she had expressed an anxiety to show by every return in her power: and this opportunity was afforded her by a letter which she had received, recommending an Italian family to her notice and protection.

This family consisted of an elderly gentleman and a young and beautiful female. They were kindly received by Lady Emily; but although they confessed themselves in straitened circumstances, they refused every other kind of aid than that which might enable the lady to make some use of her talent for music; which, from the little that Lady Emily heard, appeared to be extraordinary. As usual, she applied to her friend, who promised every assistance, and proposed to produce her at one of her own concerts, which was the surest way to bring her into fashion, and to secure her professional engagements.

Leslie, however, unable to explain the cause of the fears by which he was now perpetually assailed, and which, in spite of his usual firm nerves, kept him in a continual state of agitation; and seeing no remedy for them while the letters of Villars still left the destination of the object unknown, determined

at length to gratify the long anxious desire of Agnes to travel. Any thing he felt was better than the state of anxiety in which he lived in his own house, where every knock at the door gave him a palpitation at the heart, and the introduction of every stranger excited an unpleasant suspicion in his mind.

When this determination was announced to Agnes, it was received with delight; first, because she anticipated much gratification to her taste and imagination from the variety of scenery and the novelty of the objects which she was going to see; and secondly, because she attributed it to the wish of Leslie to gratify a long expressed inclination of hers.

To travel had long been the desire of Agnes; to see the places she had heard and read of so much—to visit the Imperial City—to sojourn in the scenes of departed greatness, was delight; but to do this with a companion who engrossed every feeling of her heart; to do this with one so capable of doubling every pleasure by the information he could afford; and to travel thus accompanied as it were by all the best affections of life, for her beloved child, with her nursery menage, was to be of their party, was indeed happiness to the heart of Agnes.

She likewise promised herself additional pleasure from the contemplation of places in which some portion of the life of Leslie had been passed. Alas! she little knew how passed, or she would not have been anxious to have recalled the circumstances connected with these scenes to his recollection.

From the moment that this tour was determined on, Leslie's mind became easier; he was sensible of the superior power of money on the Continent, should any realization of his fears occur there; and he knew also by experience, that there were a hundred ways of silencing the laws there, while here, with the high as well as the low, with the wealthy as well as the wretched, Justice takes its course. Here, indeed, blindness is her proper illustration.

While the preparations for departure were going forward, and which by their extent seemed to indicate an intention of a long sojourn abroad, Agnes issued cards for a farewell *fête*, which was intended to outvie in splendour all that had hitherto been given in Audley Square, and at which she determined to produce her friend Lady Emily's *protegée* to the fashionable world, kindly sensible that success at one of her parties would give such a stamp of currency to her talents as would ensure her the future patronage of all the *élite* of society, and thus

would prevent her being any loser by her own unexpected absence.

On the occasion of all her former *fêtes*, Leslie had appeared uneasy; had been anxious to know the number and quality of the guests; had been particular in his inquiries as to the foreigners likely to be present; and had objected to the general invitations forwarded to the different ambassadors; but on this occasion he entered with the same spirit as Agnes herself into the preparations, and seemed quite as much determined as she was to do any thing that should make the party go off with *éclat*.

Paragraph after paragraph announced the anticipated splendour of this assembly: those who had unfortunately fixed on the same evening for their own parties postponed them, both from the wish of attending Lady Arlington's, and from the fear of their own rooms being empty.

The evening at length came; the company arrived; the splendid apartments were filled to suffocation with all the rank and talent of the country. Agnes was every where attempting to communicate to her guests the happiness she herself experienced. She moved about the envy of some, the admiration of all, and had never appeared a more charming hostess than on this evening. The entertainments were to commence with a concert, to which the talents of all the principal professsors, both foreign and English, were to contribute.

The music was of the highest order. English melody was interspersed with Italian and German concerted pieces. Handel, Mozart, and Beethoven, kept up the character of Germany; Rossini and Paisiello were given as specimens of the Italian masters; while Locke, Purcell, and Bishop, sustained the reputation of English composition.

At length a buzz ran through the room that a new singer, a *protegée* of Lady Emily Hartley's, was to be produced, under the patronage of Lady Arlington, and that she was just then going to sing.

Knowing Leslie's love of music, Agnes had reserved this, which she knew would be a treat to him from his knowledge, that the surprise of such an exhibition might add to his pleasure. On looking round, however, at this moment, she perceived that he was absent, and supposing him in an adjoining apartment, which communicated with the concert room, behind the orchestra, and which had been reserved as a sort

of retiring room for themselves, and to communicate instructions to the servants, she despatched Hartley to summon him to the expected treat.

In the mean time the new singer was led to the front of the orchestra by Lady Emily, who placed herself in a seat near her. She was followed and encouraged by an elderly-looking personage, of a very interesting appearance; but though his silver hairs bespoke his age, his features seemed to depict extraordinary energy of character; and as he stood at the back of her chair, his furrowed and stern countenance formed a fine contrast to the pensive and youthful character of that of the new *débutante*. When she first entered, a long veil scarcely permitted a view of her face, and she sat down under considerable agitation: encouraged, however, by the looks of Lady Emily, and by her aged companion, she appeared to assume new courage.

As she stood up to sing, and drew aside her veil, shaking back the long black ringlets which shaded her fine forehead, a universal buzz of admiration at her beauty ran through the assembly. Her countenance was a perfect oval; her complexion presented that rare combination of dark eyes with a face fair almost to whiteness. Her eyes and hair were black and lustrous. Her hair, which hung in natural ringlets over her shoulders, was confined only by the veil which was pinned by a diamond in the centre of her forehead, from which it parted, hanging over her neck in the fashion of a Spanish mantilla. The rest of her dress was of the simplest description, and by its very simplicity was calculated to show off the fineness of her form, which was full, without being large. As the expressions of the admiration she excited reached her ear the colour brightened in her cheek, and as it subsided into silence, as one of Mozart's symphonies commenced, her agitation was so conspicuous that many thought she would not be able to accomplish her task. As the symphony died away, however, and the fine rich tones of her voice swelled through the apartment, in the recitative, all fears of this kind were dissipated, and many a disappointed professor was obliged reluctantly to confess that the anticipations raised in her favour were about to be more than realized.

The exertion used in the recitative had given her courage and energy, and she began the air with such power as to electrify her audience.

Agnes, herself delighted, was beginning to be quite vexed

at the absence of Leslie, when the door of private communication opened, and he entered: she beckoned him to a seat near her with her finger held up to hush him into silence and attention: he stole softly to her side, returning the smile of pleasure with which she had greeted him, and turning round to look at the object of universal admiration, who was at this moment indulging in one of those luxuriant cadenzas which the composition permitted, when, to the astonishment of Agnes, he started, turned pale, and uttering a half exclamation of horror, would have quitted the room. At this moment the attention of the singer being directed to the spot, her eyes met those of Leslie, the book dropped from her hand, she uttered one piercing shriek, exclaimed, "*è egli! è il mio marito*," and sunk back senseless into the arms of her aged companion.

The moment, however, that he comprehended the cause of her illness, and saw Leslie making his way from Agnes and through the company, which were now crowding towards the orchestra to learn the cause of the disturbance, he exclaimed in English, "Alive! I was sure of it." In a moment he resigned his charge to Lady Emily, and leaping with the elasticity of youth in his limbs, and with more than its energy in his countenance, from the elevated seat of the orchestra, he seized Leslie by the arm, and with a strength, which to Leslie's paralyzed nerves seemed that of a giant, dragged him towards the still fainting singer. At this moment Agnes, utterly unable to comprehend either the agitation of Leslie, or any part of the scene passing before her, but apprehensive from the sudden attack, as it seemed to her, of the foreigner upon Lord Arlington, that some mischief was intended him, rushed forward, exclaiming, "Oh save my husband!"

"*Your* husband," replied the old man, in a voice of thunder! "YOUR husband! none has a right, either here or elsewhere, to address him by that title but that injured being, that being who now lies senseless before you, killed perhaps at last by the injuries and the desertion of this man: but God is merciful and just. His ways are inscrutable, but they lead to light at last; and now, in spite of his pretended death; in spite of villany heaped on villany; in spite of project after project to escape from the pursuit of his intended victim; behold the murderer of an injured woman's peace! the destroyer of her earthly happiness, and had his insidious arts been successful, of her heavenly hopes, at last open to the calls of offended justice."

"Away, impostor," cried Leslie in fury; and resuming his courage, "I am Lord Arlington. This is deception. What accusation canst thou have against Lord Arlington?" Leslie said this in the hope that the name might perhaps shield him.

"Sir Robert Leslie," vociferated the old priest, "Sir Robert Leslie is the man I call to justice, and thou art he. You know I am no impostor; you know yourself to be the husband of Angelica di Carini; you know this to be your wife, your legal wife, not only in the sight of that Heaven which witnessed your mutual vows, and which you would have dared to offend, and might have offended with impunity on earth; but also by those human laws, which thou canst not evade: you know this; and you know that I have such irrefragable proofs afforded me by that beneficent stranger, to whom this injured being owes the preservation of her honour, that thou canst not escape."

Agnes, who, on Leslie's appeal as to the name of Arlington, had waited with breathless expectation for the reply, felt the heart-sickening conviction of the old man's truth, when in that reply he called him by the name of Leslie. These few moments had destroyed for her every hope of happiness on earth; she was the wife of a man whom she had no right to call husband, and this circumstance proved this man to be an unprincipled villain—her own spotless fame blemished—and her child, in whom so many of her hopes were centred, innocent as she was, cursed with the stain of illegitimacy. As these agonising thoughts crowded on her mind, a mist spread itself before her eyes, and fainting in the arms of those around her, she was speedily conveyed to her own apartments.

Leslie, lashed into desperation, with one energetic exertion threw the old man from him with a force that sent him to the ground, then casting a look of fury mingled with contempt at the surrounding crowd, he strode out of the apartment, in spite of the cries of the old man to stop him; and before an hour had passed, was on the road to the Continent.

The Italian lady was borne senseless from the room. Lady Emily rushed to the consolation of her friend; and the guests having now indistinctly understood the circumstances which had interrupted the entertainment, departed as fast as their carriages could be summoned, mingling their regrets for the loss of the splendid supper they had promised themselves with a hundred exclamations of surprise at what had

taken place, and many significant hints that they had always known that *all* was not right.

A few days after this scene had taken place, the following paragraph went the round of the morning papers.

"THE LATE MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR IN HIGH LIFE.

"We understand that, in consequence of the mysterious circumstances which have created so much distress in a certain noble family, that the London establishment has been broken up, one of the heads of it having departed *very suddenly* for the Continent, and the other being determined on the closest retirement. The Italian lady, whose presence it is said has been the cause of such a domestic revolution, is still under the hands of medical advisers, who give very few hopes of her recovery from the shock she has experienced."

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE TRAVELLER.

He was a melancholy man; sometimes spoke sense,
But seldom mirth; would smile, but seldom laugh;
Would lend an ear to business, dealt in none;
Gaze upon revels, antic fopperies;
But was not moved.

Never till now did Nature do her best
To show a matchless beauty to the world,
Which in an instant, ere it scarce was seen,
The jealous Destinies require again.

FORD.

It was some few years after these events that an English traveller was seen pursuing his lonely course along the Via Emilia, and by the banks of the Trebia. He had travelled several times through the whole of Italy, and avoiding society, and showing an aversion to study the manners of the existing

inhabitants of this "blue-skied" country, seemed to live only with the dead.

Instead of seeking out the living literati of the day, and viewing all those objects which abound to gratify the curiosity of the traveller in these provinces, so celebrated by art and so favoured by nature, he pursued his lonely course with no other companion than an aged domestic, and a portable edition of the Latin classics, with which it was his delight to trace out the places that were celebrated in their pages. He looked through fallen Italy for the remnants of its former grandeur, and seemed to take a melancholy pleasure in the evidences which it presented of the futility of human projects, and of the evanescence of worldly happiness, greatness, and glory.

Rome had afforded ample scope for observations of this nature, and an endless number of objects for contemplation to gratify this tendency to morbid melancholy, which in many instances had been carried to such an extent as to create a suspicion that it partook of insanity. But Rome was filled with modern travellers—English dandies were lounging in the Forum, or in the Via Sacra, and Parisian dandizettes peeping from the Tarpeian rock. Vulgar English citizens were seen climbing about the magnificent ruins of the Coliseum, or making their silly remarks among the remains of those arches, which once spoke the triumph of the conqueror; but which were pleasing to our traveller, only, as they were the evidences of the vanity of all human conquests.

His serious contemplations and classic recollections were put to flight by the crowd of artists, who were in all directions measuring the architectural remains of this "queen of the world." These are men who deduce the greatness of Rome from the diameter of a column, or from the quantity of feet and inches of masonry contained in the ruins of its buildings. They give you Rome in detail, and fritter away one of the grandest objects of sublime contemplation that the world presents, by useless disquisitions on the capitals of a column, the moulding of an entablature, or the subject of a fresco.

Our traveller, disgusted with such a congregation of heartless *Zingari*, as the Italians designate the host of hurried and hurrying voyagers, who traverse their classic plains in all kinds of carriages, from the well-appointed English barouche down to the car of their native Vetturino, left Rome to avoid

them; and with Livy and Virgil attempted to trace the scenes described in the magic pages of their works. If he succeeded, he was pleased for a moment with the success of his industry; and when he failed, he derived a secret pleasure from the morbid delight he took in the destruction of every thing that was mortal.

With Livy for his only guide, he would seek out for those celebrated fields of bloodshed and glory in which Rome laid the foundations of her greatness, and in which she struggled in the last gasp of her power, for the preservation of her liberties.

As he stood upon the plains of Trebia, the names of Annibal, of Mago, of Scipio, and of Sempronius, rose before him, clad in all the pride of conquest, or sinking under the shame of defeat; and then came the idea of the lapse of that time, which conquers the conqueror—and of the little value of the difference between defeat and victory, when a few short years and the hand of death render them alike to the victor and the vanquished.

From Virgil's descriptive lines he would attempt to discover rivers which seem to have had their sources only in the poet's imagination—

> Sometimes, misguided by the tuneful throng,
> He looked for streams immortalized in song,
> That lost in silence and oblivion lie,
> (Dumb are their fountains and their channels dry;)
> Yet run for ever by the Muse's skill,
> And in the smooth description murmur still.

It was thus that our melancholy wanderer attempted to forget himself—and to lose every trace of existing circumstances, by a recurrence to those that had passed away into that abysm which swallows the memory of all things.

With a tenacity bordering on irritation he admitted no thought of the present. His servant—and he travelled with only one, who defrayed all the expenses, and made all the regulations of his journey—saved him all the trouble of travelling; and seldom interrupted his meditations, only contemplated him with an anxious and affectionate solicitude.

The traveller himself was verging towards fifty; but his brow, divested of all the locks which had graced his early manhood, and wrinkled by the hand of care, would have impressed an observer with the idea that he had numbered many more than that quantity of years, had not his athletic form

and continued activity of body, preserved in his figure, an appearance of youth, that gave the lie to his careworn countenance.

The expression of his face was that of a sedateness, created by the effect of a powerful mind to overcome the effect of misfortunes; and in the furrows of his brow, the contemplative observer might imagine a sad record of past misery.

The servant was considerably the senior of the master; his locks were of a silvery whiteness, though his ruddy cheek and erect form gave good evidences of existing health and strength. His hair, he said, had grown gray in the service of his master and his family: and he only regretted his age, as it precluded him from the hope of seeing his master laid quietly in that grave, where he felt he could alone hope for repose.

On the day in question our traveller had, even more than usually, indulged in the dreaminess of his disposition. He had been treading on celebrated ground, and he had found the scenery still according with the accurate descriptions of Livy. Near the confluence of the Po and the Trebia, the reeds and bulrushes described by the historian seem to remain; while those whose actions rendered them so celebrated, have mingled with their native dust so many centuries.

From the reflections to which this contemplation had given rise, our traveller's mind was in some degree drawn, and perhaps soothed by the increasing loveliness of the scenery through which he was passing. As he pursued his course, the country improved in beauty; and, if not in fertility, at least in the neatness and order of its cultivation. The Apennines, as he approached them, seemed to advance with their bold forms into the plain he was traversing, forming a striking contrast to the hedges, neat enclosures, and seemingly well-appointed farm-houses, which here and there gave that appearance of domesticity to the scenery, which is seldom seen out of England; while elms, in long rows, garlanded with vines, separated the fields, and made the English traveller sensible that he was in a climate much more sunny than his own.

Numberless rivers, or rather rills, rushing from the mountains, intersected the plains, and bathing the foundations of

the time-worn walls of many an ancient town, recalled to our classical traveller's mind, the

Fluminaque antiquos subter labentia muros

of Virgil.

As he gazed upon the calm scenery by which he was surrounded, and suffered his imagination to dwell upon the peace and happiness which might, but for the vindictive passions of our nature, dwell beneath the humble roofs which were now becoming numerous, he felt more soothed —more like his former self—more like the benevolent being he was formed to have been, than he had done for years.

As he approached the Pisatello, the Rubicon of the ancients, he entered a small, clean town, beautifully situated at the foot of a ridge of fine hills, which seemed to rise like giants from the plain to support the villas and convents, and the remains of a romantic old castle, which adorned their summits.

At the entrance to this little town, standing insulated, was a neat cottage, approaching almost to the character of a villa. Its white front, its general proportions, together with the flowers and vines by which it was almost hidden, united with its extreme neatness and elegance, arrested the attention of our traveller. There was an approach to Englishism in the appearance of its garden and appurtenances, which particularly struck him: and one of those indefinable curiosities, for which we cannot account, came over his mind to know something of its inhabitants.

Almost surprised at a feeling so new to him, he desired his servant to put up for the night in the village; and driving to the only inn that afforded accommodation for travellers, he was speedily made the tenant of one of the only two private rooms that the house contained. These two apartments had been originally one, but the landlord had found his account in the solitary and exclusive propensities of English travellers, in dividing it by a thin partition, so as to form two separate, but small chambers.

His servant soon gave the officious padrone notice not to annoy his master with his civilities; and he was left alone to his contemplations. His eye wandered to the window, which commanded a complete, though distant, view of the cottage

which had before attracted his particular attention. It was situated just upon the declivity of one of the hills; and from its elevated situation, was easily perceptible from all parts of the village. As he gazed upon this cottage with an interest for which he could not account, he observed several persons approach it with hurried steps, and after having a moment's conversation with the inmates, retire slowly; and the uplifted hands of some of these visiters on their return, seemed to be urging some petition to Heaven, while the after pressure of the hand to the brow, as they seemed to dash a tear from their eyes, indicated that they had but slender hopes in the effect of their prayers.

Still interested, he knew not why, he determined to ascertain who were the inhabitants of this cottage; and he was on the point of astonishing his servant by this inquiry, when his attention was arrested by the sound of sobs below, and by the attempts of the landlord to soothe the grief of the person by whom they were uttered.

In a moment afterwards his servant entered, followed by a young Englishwoman in tears, who approaching the traveller, attempted for some time to explain the meaning of her intrusion; at length, amidst sobs which she tried in vain to subdue, she uttered an incoherent sentence, in which "my mistress, my dear mistress," were the only words which her agitation rendered audible.

The traveller soothed her agitation, and entreated her to speak the cause of her trouble, and to tell him how he could assist her; at length becoming calmer, she told him that her mistress, an English lady was dying—that she was given over—that a few hours must inevitably terminate her existence; and that having heard that an English gentleman had just arrived in the village, she had despatched her to the inn to entreat his presence for a few moments, as a witness to some of the acts which were necessary in the final settlement of her affairs. The messenger finished her recital with the exclamation of—"Oh, my dear, dear mistress—my dear mistress!"

In spite of his morbid melancholy, the traveller was instantly alive to all the feelings of kindness and benevolence; and seizing his hat, prepared to accompany the girl to her mistress.

As they passed through the village, every body addressed the servant with inquiries after *la beinissima signora Inglesa*;

and the tears which startled to their eyes, as the girl silently answered them only by a melancholy shake of the head, sufficiently testified their grief and their esteem for the English invalid.

His interest each moment increasing, he did not perceive the path he was pursuing, until he found himself at the wicket which led to the cottage, which had excited so much interest in his mind; an interest which now appeared to be the effect of presentiment. The wicket was opened, and they pursued their way through a narrow serpentine path decorated with flowers and shaded by evergreens, which, interlacing at the top, rendered it almost impervious to the sun. This path led to a Venetian window, opening into a small saloon, which formed a vestibule to the larger apartments of the house.

Here they were received by an Italian female domestic, likewise in tears, who to the hurried and whispered inquiries of her fellow-servant, only sobbed a "*No—no—signora*," and withdrew.

The English girl now requested the traveller to stay here while she communicated his arrival to her mistress, and passing into the next room, which seemed to be the principal apartment of the cottage, she disappeared through the folding doors at the other end, leaving, however, all the doors ajar in her progress.

The traveller had now time to collect himself for this unexpected interview: every thing around him reminded him of England: the books were English; the pictures, views from England; and most of the furniture of English manufactory; yet every thing around seemed to be of a melancholy aspect. The harp and piano seemed to have been long neglected; books of music lay carelessly by them, as though months had elapsed since their leaves had been disturbed. The books were covered with dust, excepting a few volumes which had recently been displaced; and these were such as treated of death, and of the preparations for the great change which must at some time or other come over all of us.

The flowers in the parterre were languishing for want of water; and those which were distributed in the alibaster and porcelain vases, with which the room was decorated, were dead.

He looked from the window; the autumnal leaves were falling, and the sun was fast approaching the horizon to leave

the world to that immediate night which is the characteristic of those countries where twilight is unknown. Every thing about the cottage seemed illustrative of the dying state of its inhabitant; every thing spoke of things that have been, rather than of the things that were to be; and they found a melancholy accordance with the mind of the traveller.

Low murmurs now reached his ear, proceeding from the sick chamber; and he was presently informed that the dying lady would be ready to receive him in a few minutes.

The messenger closed the door as she departed; and he presently heard a noise like that of wheeling a couch into the next room, which was every now and then mingled with sighs and faint exclamations of pain from the exhausted invalid.

All was now again silent, and time seemed to be taken that the patient might recover the effect of the recent exertion; at length some footsteps softly approached, and opening the folding-doors with such care that they made no noise, the English servant beckoned the traveller to approach.

The silent solemnity of the scene, the group of which he caught only an indistinct view through the doors, and the ideas connected with the circumstance of a countrywoman thus dying in a foreign land, all united still for a few moments to arrest his steps.

Recovering himself, however, and collecting all his firmness, he entered the apartment. The invalid was reposing on a large bed-chair, supported by pillows; on each side of her, resting upon the elbows of the chair, were an aged couple, evidently Italians; at a little distance, at her feet, on an ottoman, sat a female child, apparently about four or five years old; and at the back, were several domestics with handkerchiefs at their eyes, striving to prevent the effusions of that grief which would sometimes burst forth in spite of themselves. Guided by the pointing finger of the girl who had summoned him, the traveller advanced, and stood in the front of the dying person, who was so placed that the light fell full and equally upon both of them.

Their eyes met: a tremor—a convulsive start, that almost moved the chair which supported her, spoke the unusual agitation of the sick lady; while the alternately pale and flushed countenance—the eager gaze—the trembling limbs of the astonished traveller, as he caught at a table for support, betrayed some mutual recognition. In the pale face—the

sunken cheek—the attenuated form of the dying person, the traveller thought he again saw the pallid and lifeless form of his first love; and the dying person recognised the tall and manly form which she had only once seen when he was weeping, and blessed her over the lifeless remains of her mother.

It was, indeed, Clifton, or rather Walmer; and the daughter of her whom he had loved so truly—so devotedly—so lastingly: a daughter, whose happiness had ever been dear to him, though he had never seen her excepting in that one interview, when over the corpse of her mother they had mingled the tears of innocent childhood and virtuous manhood in a stream which fell upon the lifeless remains before them: a daughter, whose dying eyes he was now called upon to close, while she was yet in the earliest stage of life; and whom his various warnings had not been able to save from a fate of which he knew that the violence of her feelings were too likely to make her the victim.

The effect of her illness—her near approach to death—had given to Agnes a still more striking resemblance to her mother; and as Clifton gazed upon her at first, his mind was seized for a moment with the impression, that he was again looking upon the corpse of his "beloved Agnes Dornton:" for by that name was her memory engraven upon his heart.

On the part of Agnes, the sight of Clifton had carried her mind and memory, at one stride, back to the days of her youth, to the death of her mother, and to all the misery she had experienced through that loss. Young as she had been, the effect of the scene with Clifton, in the chamber of death, was ineffaceable; and his person too strongly imprinted upon her memory, by the solemnity of the circumstances under which they met, for her ever to forget it. Perhaps, too, in the moment approaching death, and so near her own departure, it is natural for the mind to look back through all the life we have passed; and in such a restrospect, the prominent circumstances of existence paint themselves upon our memory in vivid colours, and give the mind a power of recognition and recollection which does not exist in the enjoyment of health and in the mixture with society.

His person had also been kept continually in her memory from the circumstance of her having, since she had, so fatally for herself, discovered their truth, connected the mysterious warning she had once received, and those she had

since heard of, with the person who had sworn to protect and to watch over her happiness in such a solemn moment.

Clifton would not perhaps have recognised Agnes in the bloom of health, but his heart could not mistake her in the strong resemblance she bore to the corpse of her mother —a sight that nothing could drive from his mind or his memory.

"It is—it is," said he, approaching the invalid, and almost kneeling, "it is Agnes, the daughter of——" He could not proceed—he could not utter the name of her who had influenced his destiny.

"It is indeed," faintly articulated the dying Agnes; "it is the daughter of her we both wept over, and to whose spirit that of her daughter will soon be again united. Alas! why did it not quit me then, and accompany hers into the realms of bliss without having——" Here she stopped: every one around her seemed absorbed in grief; and Clifton, from having for so long a time kept under every expression of human feeling, was agitated beyond his immediate power of recovery.

Agnes was the first to regain her self-possession; and, tenderly pressing the hand that had taken hers—

"Come, sir," said she, "come, my second parent—for such let me call you now, when I am so soon going to my eternal one—let me entreat you to calm this agitation. I have still some things to do in this world which I am quitting —not for myself, but for those I leave behind me—and I would willingly soothe this parting hour with the idea that every thing that I *can* do, is done for their comfort. As to consolation, time alone will bring that; though the knowledge that I am quitting a life of misery——"

She here breathed with difficulty, and Clifton would have prevented her continuance; but she waved her hand, and proceeded:

"No, no; my time is short: and Providence has sent me in you a guardian to yonder infant—for which my heart beats with thankfulness—and in the hope of which I find a pleasure which I did not dare expect in these solemn moments. For the last week I have anxiously hoped that some English traveller might pass through this village; and I had directed that any such might have my dying request made to them for an interview, that I might deposite copies of the last disposition of my property in their hands, and entreat their temporary

protection for her who will so soon be parentless. The sight of you alters my view. Say, sir—dare I hope that the temporary protection, which was the first thing I sought, may be converted into perpetual guardianship ?"

Clifton assented, and exerted himself sufficiently to draw up a paper constituting himself her sole executor, and guardian to the child, which she named Agnes Dornton. This was immediately signed, witnessed, and attached as a codicil to the will which she had employed all her strength, for the last few weeks, in writing.

When this was done, a smile played upon her pale features, and she said, "I am satisfied:" then making a motion for every one to withdraw save Clifton and the child, they were left alone.

The child was seated close to her mother, and, perfectly unconscious of the solemnity of the scene and the circumstances by which she was surrounded, continued picking her flowers to pieces, and scattering the fragments on the floor. Sometimes she would look up, and smile in her mother's face, and hold out her lips for a kiss, and stretch out her arms for an embrace, which the feebleness of Agnes scarcely permitted her to grant.

Parting the locks which clustered on the child's forehead with one hand, and pointing to its countenance with the other, "Do you accept the charge ?" said she.

"I do ; and it shall be the business, as well as the pleasure of my life, to fulfil it completely. This child shall find a parent in one who never was a father ; and it shall be my care so to guide her young mind—so to regulate her youthful heart—that she shall never be the prey ——"

He stopped ; he felt that he had touched a chord that must jar upon the mind of Agnes, and he was silent.

"Proceed, proceed," said she ; "I know what you would say ; and I bless God for having provided a guardian for my daughter who will give that regulation to her heart and feeling which her mother wanted. Poor child ! what may she not have to pass through ? The blot upon her birth too :"—and here the colour mantled on her cheek :—"but I have overcome my pride now. I look beyond this world ; I have had a hard struggle to bring my heart down, and to submit : but it is past."

She stopped again, from some internal pain or weakness

which oppressed her, and Clifton entreated her to repose herself, but she refused.

"My time is but short—an hour, perhaps, and these lips will be pale, and stiff, and cold; a little hour, and I shall be like that sainted mother over whom we wept together. But I will not agitate you: when I wished to see a countryman, and to interest him in the fate of this infant, I expected a stranger. All I had then to do was to have intrusted him with my will, and have entreated him to see that my child was sent safely to England: but with you it is different. The sight of you has brought all the scenes of my past life before me; and the charge you have undertaken makes an account of circumstances subsequent to my quitting England your due."

It was in vain Clifton entreated her to stop—she would proceed. She then related her journey to Italy, to ascertain the truth of Leslie's former marriage; her discovery of the parents of Angelica reduced to poverty and despair by the loss of their child; and touched slightly upon the subsequent persecutions of Leslie.

"In these inquiries, I discovered that an attempt had been made to deceive Angelica with a false marriage, which had been rendered abortive by an English stranger."

"I—I was that stranger," exclaimed Walmer. "But for me—you would have been his wife——"

"You?" faintly asked Agnes.

"Yes. Accident brought me where I overheard the whole of the villanous plan projected; and by a communication with the Italian parties to the scheme, and a bribe superior to that which they had received, I substituted a real priest—was myself a secret witness of the ceremony—and made an attestation to that effect; a copy of which, in my handwriting, convinced Leslie that he was actually her husband. But proceed——"

"From the moment," continued she, "that I discovered that Angelica was really his wife—and that I—was—Oh God!—nothing but a dishonoured woman, I determined never to see him more—yet—dare I confess it?—this rebel heart still continued to linger round the recollection of what I had pictured him to be, and I had daily and hourly struggles to reduce it to the performance of its duty—a duty rendered still more difficult by the persecutions of Leslie—." Whenever she mentioned the name, her voice faltered still

more. "Subsequent knowledge of him, however, rendered this duty easy; but I will not recur to this—I pity and forgive him—and now, even in my last hour, pray for him, and entreat his Maker to give him repentance while it is yet time. But he used me cruelly—broke the heart which doted on him." Here she struggled with her feelings. "But why should I complain?—mine was not the only heart he has broken. But again—I forgive and pray for him. When I found the parents of the unhappy Angelica poor and wretched. I could not help feeling that, perhaps, I had been accessory to the fate of their daughter. They did not know me—they know me not as yet, excepting as a betrayed and deserted woman; and the similarity of my fate to that of their daughter has created an interest in them which has made them second parents to me, as I have tried to prove a second daughter to them. I persuaded them to leave their native village, which is in a distant part of Italy, to reside with me here; and I have derived my only pleasure, the last three years, in contributing to their comforts. I have provided for them at my death. My great aim has been to bring my heart and mind into a proper frame to meet the moment now so near—so very near at hand—and I have done it. Oh! sir, the death-blow was given *then*—THEN!" and she spoke with more energy. "But the heart is strong—and long—long breaking—though it *will* break at last." She breathed with difficulty. Clifton could not speak: the child was all unconscious;

**And on its dying mother smiled.**

Her respiration became still more difficult: he would have summoned the attendants, but she restrained him, and pointed to the window—faintly articulated—"Air—air—to breathe."

Clifton opened it; and the pure air rushed in, perfumed with the flowers over which it had passed. Its freshness seemed to revive her; she half rose from the pillow, and gazed through the open window. The sun was setting in large floods of crimson and gold directly opposite to the house; the wide landscape, with its trees, and fields, and rivers, seemed to glow with its setting beams; the distant Trebia glittered as it wound through the plains, and all the

windows of the villas, and churches, and convents, seemed to glance reflected fire.

"It is a beautiful world," she said. "Is it not? Why are there those who spoil it?—Hark!—hark!—surely I am dying, and I hear the strains that welcome me to heaven!" Clifton thought her senses wandered.

At this moment the distant peal of an organ was heard, and the voices of the nuns in the neighbouring convent arose in all the harmony of the evening vespers: as the sound reached the vale, it was increased by the voices of the villagers; who, from windows and doors, joined in the devotion of the "rosario."

Mellowed by distance, it did indeed seem the music of another sphere. Agnes looked upwards, as though she expected to see some unearthly musicians.

"My mother seems to call me!" she faintly murmured. Her arms then attempted to embrace her child, who had now fallen asleep. She gazed at the landscape—but her eye grew gradually glazed and unconscious—the sun threw its last beam of day on her pallid countenance—the strains died away in gentle murmurs—and as the last sounds floated in the air, a slight convulsion was perceptible on the lips; and the instant after she fell back on her pillow and breathed her last.

Clifton sunk on his knees, and burying his face in the drapery, remained absorbed in his grief, unable to summon any of the household to say that she was gone

——— white in her soul, to fill a throne
Of innocence and sanctity in heaven.

## CHAPTER XXI.

The hours of folly and of fond delight
Are wasted all, and fled; those that remain
Are doom'd to weeping, anguish, and repentance.
I come to charge thee with a long account.
OLD PLAY.

THE moment that the spirit of Agnes had departed, and that Walmer felt, from the chilly inanimation of the hand he held, that the vital spark had really fled, a sigh of unutterable agony burst from his heart. He seemed again to lose the Agnes, the beloved of his youth; he seemed again to feel all those miseries which that loss had occasioned him: and as he gazed on the pallid yet beautiful form that lay lifeless before him—as he recalled all that he had heard of her gayety, her goodness, and her talent, and saw her cut off thus early by the selfishness of an unprincipled libertine, a new feeling took possession of his bosom—his brain burned—and he internally vowed revenge upon the unnatural villain who could thus scatter destruction round him, and still pursue his unfeeling course, undeterred by example and unpunished by the laws. It seemed a duty that he owed his Agnes—his own Agnes—the mother of her who now lay before him. The moment this idea took possession of his mind, he repeated his vow, and determined to make its accomplishment the business of his life—resolved that the days which had hitherto been devoted to deeds of benevolence should for the future have a sterner purpose; and he brooded over this project, till he almost thought the idea inspired by his God, and that his arm was selected to do public justice upon the recreant Leslie.

A change now came over his soul. His mind was wrought up to a determined energy: a new object occupied his thoughts. The idea that the spirit of her before him had fled to join that of her angel-mother, and that his presence had contributed to soften the agony of its departure, failed to soothe him. Vengeance was the only word and feeling

that seemed to be written upon his brain; and this vengeance, to his diseased imagination, seemed to be virtue.

As he contemplated, however, the soft and placid expression of the countenance, beautiful even in death, these thoughts again died within him. The idea, too, that the infant, who was calmly sleeping at the feet of its dead mother, unconscious of the horrors by which it was surrounded, and insensible to the stigma which an unnatural father had cast upon its future life, was still the child of the man against whom his vow of revenge was directed—changed his determination to a milder purpose.

During this long contemplation, darkness had come upon him; but just at this moment, the broad full moon arose, and throwing its white light into the apartment, seemed to add to the pallidness of the corse, to which he now summoned the attendants.

He easily separated the child from the mother, whose dead hand was still resting on its head; and gave it to the charge of the weeping English girl. The elderly woman and other female attendants undertook to dress the body, and to perform the necessary ceremonies of laying it out, and Clifton left the apartment, attended by old Di Carini, to affix his seals on all the boxes and drawers of the deceased, and to learn from him such particulars as he knew of the last few years of her life.

From this afflicted old man he learned, that during the two years that they had lived with her, she had passed her whole time in alternate acts of devotion and of charity, and in her duties to her child. That she never seemed to derive the pleasure parents generally feel from the increasing beauty and intelligence of her offspring, but frequently wept over it, in an agony which was to the old couple quite unaccountable. They had once, he said, saw her weeping and kneeling before it, when she thought she was unobserved, and she seemed to be entreating its pardon, as though she had done it some irreparable injury; that this, together with her sometimes, in fits of despondency, addressing him and his wife as though she had injured them, while they owed all the comforts of their life to her, had made them frequently think that all was not right in her head. Her unceasing kindness to all about her, her extensive benevolence, and her active virtues, had endeared her to every body, and her death would

be regretted by the whole village, as that of a common parent and friend to them all.

"The only cessation of her sufferings," he said, "appeared to be while she was thus employed in relieving her fellow-creatures; that all the rest of her time was spent in a misery which was evident to all around her, and which they all saw was gradually undermining her health, and hastening the sad catastrophe that had at length occurred.

"It appeared," he continued, "that she seemed to wish to expiate some crime; and that had they not known her to be such an angel of goodness, the bitterness of her repentance would have induced them to have supposed that she had been guilty of some error which she thought nothing but such a life of penitence could atone."

Here was indeed, thought Walmer, the very soul and spirit of virtue; here was indeed the heart framed of the best materials of human nature; and his mind felt soothed with the ideas of the goodness which he imagined was now meeting its reward in that heaven for which it was formed. And then again arose his indignation at her destroyer, rendered stronger by the contrast of her character with his. But it no longer assumed the character of vengeance; the more he heard of the benignity of Agnes, the more he felt it would be her wish to leave his punishment to that God whose laws he had so openly violated; and the more he felt that forgiveness was more consonant to her feelings than revenge. The more he contemplated the character that had departed, the more did he think her worthy to be the daughter of his own Agnes; and that in Walmer's mind, was the very apex of praise—the very acme of goodness.

With these reflections, he quitted the house of death, and pursued his course to the inn. Every thing was still and quiet without, and the clear blue sky, with its bright calm moon, and its myriad of stars, tranquillized his mind.

On his arrival, he found the court-yard of the little alberga filled with horses and servants. Two carriages were drawn up at the door, and the jaded cattle were standing near them smoking and trembling with the effects of a journey, in which they had evidently been urged beyond their speed. His own language struck upon his ear as it was uttered in hurried accents by men who seemed evidently to have been engaged in some adventure which created either a fear of discovery or pursuit; and there was an evident air of mys-

tery and concealment about the whole party. Hurried orders and inquiries were given and made, both in Italian and English; and low curses were heard in each language, at the delay which seemed to have arisen in procuring fresh horses. Continued communications seemed to be made to the principals of the party, who were up-stairs; and as the messengers descended, it was evidently only with fresh and impatient instructions to hasten the horses and hurry forward. Those which had brought the carriage, were declared incompetent to go on, but one or two of the freshest were selected to forward messengers to other inns, for the purpose of procuring others to proceed forward with the carriages.

The hurry and confusion of this scene, in which all was life and animation, formed a strong and a sad contrast with that which Walmer had just witnessed, and it struck jarringly on his feelings. A man who like him had lived for years with those who had long since passed away from the world, except in the memory of the deeds they had left behind them, and who had just come from the bed of death, was not likely to feel an interest in the unmeaning bustle of some tourist, hurrying from place to place with no other view perhaps than to kill the time which was burdensome to him, and whose whole haste consisted in that unmeaning restlessness which hurried him without any other motive than the mere love of loco-motion.

Walmer passed on without inquiry, and shunning the observation of the domestics belonging to the traveller, ascended to his apartment. Glad to have escaped unannoyed and unquestioned, he threw himself into his chair, and gave himself up to the reflections created by the scene he had just witnessed. His whole life passed in review before him—his early love for Agnes Dornton—her death—his struggles—her daughter—and all that she had suffered through the perfidious, the daring, and the villanous Leslie. The papers containing a recital of all these persecutions lay before him, traced in the hand of her who had been thus early consigned to the tomb by the acuteness of those feelings which could not outlive even unmerited dishonour. His whole heart was absorbed in these reflections, when through the thin partition which divided the apartments of the little inn, he heard the sobs of a female. They suddenly increased till they became almost hysterical, and faltering accents, which bespoke acute distress, were uttered in a soft

Italian voice, and were soothed by that of a man who spoke the language with a foreign accent. The latter voice breathed an English curse or two at the delay of the horses. The female, by her tone of supplication, seemed to be pleading, but it was all uttered so softly, that Walmer could not catch the words. Sometimes reproaches were uttered, and attempted to be calmed by tenderness; then a flood of tears altogether stopped every sound, but those of sighs, which seemed to come from a bursting heart. These were succeeded by agonising expressions of fear and an anxious entreaty to return, which seemed to create an impatience almost arising to an expression of temper on the part of her companion, which again caused fresh floods of tears; and these were again soothed by a promise on the part of the other that they should return instantly, and an assurance that they should still be in time. Hurried and impatient steps were heard across the apartment, and the quick opening and shutting of the door and window, as the traveller called out his hurried inquiries after horses, in Italian, French, and English, betrayed the anxiety, at least, of one of the parties to proceed. Then again all was silent, save the convulsive sobs of the female, who frequently exclaimed that she was an unhappy and lost wretch. Then a slight struggle, and a burning kiss, and smothered emotions of mingled love and anger —struggles, as it appeared to Walmer, between temptation and virtue. Interrupted and agitated as the conversation was, he thought that he could discover that the parties were a runaway wife and her paramour, and that the deluded lady had already repented her rash step, and would return if her seducer would permit her.

This idea was confirmed as the conversation became more collected, and consequently more audible. Walmer now collected from her reproaches, that she had been betrayed by some perfidy into the present step involuntarily. These were replied to by soothings—by oaths—by protestations of fidelity. By "words which burn," and which seemed to be but too welcome, and to make but too deep impression upon the hearer. Her sighs became less frequent and softer. Her reproaches were uttered in a more tender accent. She seemed upon the point of relenting, and Walmer had almost determined to rush into the presence of the parties to sustain her sinking virtue, and offer her a protector back to the husband and the home which she had quitted, when his steps

were arrested, and the whole current of his blood turned, by the exclamation of "O Signor Leslie!" which burst for the first time from the lips of the female.

As though the eye of the basilisk had fallen upon him—as though the finger which petrified Niobe had touched him, Walmer was struck motionless. He scarcely believed his ears, and watched with breathless suspense for some succeeding sound, which should confirm or annihilate his suspicion that he was indeed under the same roof with him whom he had, within an hour, so bitterly cursed—with him whose work of cruelty he had, within an hour, seen accomplished —with him who had destroyed the peace of mind, and the life of the favourite child of Agnes Dornton.

The name had been uttered in a half tone of tenderness—in a tone in which softness and yielding were mingled with reproach: and a silence of some minutes succeeded, till, as it seemed with exertion, the voice again exclaimed—"Mai —Mai! Signor Leslie."

It was he.—It was confirmed.—It was Leslie—*the* Leslie —for surely Walmer thought there could be but one Leslie in the world. He pressed the fingers of both hands tightly upon his brow, as though he would have prevented his brain from wandering. He gulped down an exclamation of horror and detestation, which was forcing itself into utterance from his overcharged heart. He did stamp with convulsive energy on the floor, for he could not entirely restrain himself, and the sound seemed to have been overheard, since the voice of the female again bespoke terror, and the conversation sunk into hurried whispers.

Walmer's determination was speedily concluded. He seized a pen—wrote a few hurried lines, and hastened from his apartment, to despatch it to him to whom it was addressed.

In the mean time, Leslie—for it was indeed Leslie, was using the whole of his rhetoric to allay the fears of his companion—to soothe her into quietude, and to prevent her from returning, which she had most vehemently petitioned to do.

He was reclined on a *fauteuil*, with his arms round her waist. She was half upon her knees, as though she had even used that humble position to entreat that he would spare her. Her dark hair had escaped from her travelling hat—her eyes were suffused with tears—her bosom palpitated—and she still entreated, though with less energy, that he would be generous and save her, while she might still return with

safety and with honour. But Leslie was too much accustomed to sighs and tears, to be moved from his purpose; and he had too light an idea of woman's repentance, and more particularly an Italian woman's, to anticipate all the horrors which this unfortunate lady pictured to herself.

He drank up her tears with burning kisses, every one of which only added strength to his determination, and breathed promises of fidelity—of love—of pleasure—in return for her sighs. He pictured in glowing terms the life of love they might lead—the delights of gratified passion—the days and years of bliss that awaited them—and found that remorse was giving way to brighter anticipations, when La Tour entered the apartment with a letter.

"Qu'est-ce que c'est?"

"Un billet, monsieur."

"De qui?"

"D'un étranger—d'un monsieur Anglais."

"Qui me connoît?"

"Oui, monsieur."

"Et tu, maraud—tu l'as dit mon nom?"

"Non, monsieur. Il me l'a dit lui-même. Il me disait qu'il étoit inutile de le nier—qu'il savait bien que monsieur étoit——"

"Silence!—donnez.—Ha!—what do I see—the handwriting—THE handwriting—still wet too—still freshly written——" and all languages but his own fled from his memory and his power, in his astonishment at again seeing that handwriting which had so often crost him in his career, and at the knowledge that the mysterious penman was so close at hand.

He tore open the letter, heedless of the anxious glance of his companion. It simply said—"An English woman requires the attendance of Sir Robert Leslie; a countryman awaits him at the garden gate, to conduct him where his presence is required. It will be time enough to proceed in his present pursuit when the scene is past—which he *must* witness. Leslie must not fail, and he must come alone."

Recollections of assassination came over his mind as he perused the billet. But these were quickly banished from his fearless mind—and all was absorbed in the intense curiosity to discover the mysterious correspondent, and in the desire of punishing his frequent interference with his schemes.

"Dites que je viens lui joindre."

"Monsieur, il est parti."

"Eh bien, je pars aussi—Restez-vous ici—Que les chevaux soient prêts à mon retour."—Then turning to the trembling lady, who had set silently gazing at this inexplicable scene, he soothed her terror—told her it was but a civility required of him by a compatriot, which would be paid in a few minutes—that he should return before the horses were ready; consigned her to La Tour's especial care, with directions not to permit her escape—seized a small dress sword which lay loosely among the baggage which strewed the floor; and hastily throwing his travelling cloak round him, proceeded to the garden gate.

Arrived at the spot, he looked eagerly around, but could see nobody; and he was almost beginning to imagine that he had been deceived, when he started at suddenly beholding a tall figure close at his side, wrapped up in a long cloak, and pointing to a path that led a little to the right up the mountain, in the direction of some villas, whose windows glittered like plates of silver in the white light of the moon.

Leslie receded, and cast an inquiring look at his conductor—hesitated for a moment—then addressing himself to the adventure—would have demanded who and what were the persons that required his attendance in this imperious manner.

Walmer waved his hand in silence—and so commanding was his action, that Leslie involuntarily obeyed—and followed his long and rapid strides through the serpentine path that presented itself.

Walmer's figure was remarkably tall, and looked of a still greater height from the drapery of the cloak in which it was enveloped. Leslie could catch no glimpse of his features; but as he followed his dark figure—rendered still more dark by its contrast with the moonlight, and when it gained much in advance of him, appearing relieved only by the clear though deep-blue sky, he almost fancied it was some supernatural being—some Mephistophiles leading him to his fate—his mind recurred too to all the mysterious warnings that Agnes had received, in the same handwriting—to the mysterious interference in the affair with Angelica—and a shuddering crept through his frame in spite of himself and in spite of that daring audacity which was one of his most conspicuous characteristics.

Every thing around was so silent, that every footstep of the

stranger that fell upon the pathway almost produced an echo, and was the only sound that met his ear, except his own hard breathing. The stranger proceeded: they left two or three small cottages to the left, and approached one in which a light still burned. At the entrance wicket Walmer stopped, and turning round, appeared like a being of superior power waiting for his victim. Here Leslie caught a slight glimpse of his countenance as the moon fell upon it; but he saw nothing distinctly, except the flash of a dark eye that seemed to glance at him with indignation.

This was sufficient to brace every nerve: it roused his courage into action; and he followed through the wicket and up the covered walk with a step almost as proud and firm as that of his conductor.

Here the overhanging branches nearly obscured them from the light of the moon, and the entrance seemed to open almost magically to the word of Walmer. He beckoned Leslie to enter: they passed through the anti-chamber, then the drawing-room, at the farther end of which a light was seen through the door. A faint smell as of faded flowers pervaded these apartments, and for a moment Leslie felt their sickening influence; but the tread of his conductor as it now fell heavily on the boarded floor, recalled his attention.

At the door of the inner apartment Walmer stopped, and holding it a moment in his hand, he turned suddenly round, and in a deep solemn voice, he uttered—"Prepare!!"

"For what?" said the dauntless Leslie.

"For that which, if thou hast a human heart, will break it.—For that which, if thou hast one grain of the common feelings of humanity, will wring them to agony.—For that which, if thou hast one particle of conscience, will touch it with never-dying remorse!"

Leslie was thunderstruck,—he knew not what to expect—his mind wandered through the labyrinths of his memory of the past and anticipations of the future, to divine what was to come; yet he was fearless.

"Lead on—I am prepared for any thing."

"Enter," exclaimed Walmer, in a voice of thunder. "Enter, and behold thy work!"

He threw open the door, and Leslie beheld a couch with tapers placed at its feet and head. The couch was covered with a sheet, on which were strewn sprigs of rosemary and yew. Just over it, at the head, was a large picture, covered

with a green curtain. By its side was a small desk, on which were a missal and a rosary, as though some one had been recently praying there. The window, which reached to the ground, was partly open, so that the flames of the tapers flickered in the night-breeze, and rendered the light still more doubtful. The forms which the sheet that covered the couch presented, were too defined not to convey at once to the eye that a corpse was concealed beneath it.

Leslie started—he hesitated. Walmer advanced to the couch; and laying his hand upon the sheet, slowly and solemnly exclaimed, "Approach, and contemplate thy work." Perceiving his hesitation—Ha! dost fear the effects of crime, and yet not fear to commit it?

The word fear acted like electricity upon the nerves of Leslie: he approached firmly; Walmer threw off the covering suddenly, and Leslie shrunk back shuddering and pale, and trembling, as the hollow and sunken features, and thin and attenuated form of Agnes met his view; a convulsive shudder crept through his whole frame; his hair had the sensation of bristling upon his head, and every nerve seemed to vibrate to some unpleasant, some unnatural touch.

He wished to withdraw his eyes, but could not. His feet seemed the only steady part of his whole frame; and they felt rooted to the floor. Nature burst forth in huge drops of perspiration, which rolled down his forehead; his hand involuntarily stretched itself out, as though it would have some palpable proof of the reality of the object before him—but shrunk back before it came in contact with the corpse.

At length, and as if with a powerful effort, he closed his eyes; but they were in an instant again wide open, and again fixed upon the object, which seemed to fascinate their glance.

Another effort enabled him to turn them for a moment from the dead form of Agnes to the living one of his conductor, which seemed to tower into supernatural proportions as he contemplated with his keen, dark, yet solemn eye, the agitation of Leslie from the other side of the couch, from which he pointed to the corpse.

The present scene, and the events of the evening, had wrought up the mind of Walmer to a species of unnatural excitement, and he witnessed the agony of Leslie with a feeling bordering on delight.

"Ha! ha! and thou canst feel? Glad am I that all is not

dead within thee, for then this scene will wring thy soul. Look! look!! look!!!" and his voice rose, as he repeated the word, into a tone of fierceness—"look at all that was once so lovely; look at all that was once so gay, so happy, and so innocent. But innocent she was to the last; even thy demoniac power could not blast her innocence. But thou destroyed her happiness: you broke her heart. The flowers of her existence were withered under thy pestilential influence; her youth, her loveliness, her goodness, her life, were sacrificed to thine accursed selfishness. She was kind and confiding, and you betrayed her. You found her beaming with life, gayety, animation, and talent; and you leave her a senseless corse, cut off in the commencement of her career. Mark these hollow, sunken cheeks, and recollect the bloom thou foundst upon them. Mark those death-like, ghastly eyes, and remember the glances of intelligence with which they beamed. Look at this attenuated form, worn out with suffering from which she had no refuge but the grave, and damn thyself with the thought that it is thine accursed work. Oh, God of heaven!" and he suddenly lifted up his hands in the action of prayer—"how inscrutable are thy ways! that such a man—such a monster—should be permitted still to crawl upon thy earth to blast the fairest of thy creatures! Keep down, I beseech thee, this rebellious heart, that would engender thoughts adverse to thy justice and to thy wisdom, when I see guilt standing before me in the full enjoyment of health and strength, and means to accomplish more crime—and innocence blighted in its bud, a pale corpse, lifeless in the very presence of the destroyer, Sir Robert Leslie! for that was the name under which this crime was committed, and no title can ennoble it:" and he turned his eyes from heaven and fixed them full upon the guilty being before him, who seemed struck speechless with astonishment and horror. "Sir Robert Leslie!" and his voice was raised to an almost unnatural pitch, when the inner door of the apartment was burst open, and the aged couple rushed into the room, exclaiming in Italian—

"Leslie! who names Leslie? who calls upon that accursed name—the betrayer of our only hope—the destroyer of our only child!"

Walmer, in the absorbing feelings which had been excited by Agnes, had forgotten every thing else.

Leslie gazed upon the aged pair without recognition They looked at him with loathing and horror, and again renewed their exclamations and reproaches.

"Who, and what are you," hoarsely murmured Leslie, "that you bellow your curses in my ear? What have I done to you? Who have I betrayed—what have I destroyed of yours?"

At this question, indistinctly uttered as it was, a simultaneous movement urged them towards the picture; with a quick, convulsive grasp they withdrew the curtain, and Leslie beheld with astonishment the full-length portrait of Angelica di Carini, the old people's only child.

The uncertainty of the flickering light, the brightness of the colouring of the figure, the darkness of the ground, and the sudden withdrawing of the curtain, gave such effect to the portrait, that, for a moment, to Leslie's confused senses, it seemed as though Angelica had again started into actual life. The form seemed walking from the canvas, and he ready to fly from its approach.

All was now silent. The aged parents of Angelica stood holding the curtain aside with one hand, and with the other directing his eyes to the form of their betrayed child. Walmer still stood by the side of the couch, pointing to the corpse of Agnes; the child, who had crept into the room, placed its little hands upon the pillow, as though seeking its mother: while Leslie stood petrified, turning his glances from one object of horror only to rest them on another.

"Now, Sir Robert Leslie, view well your work!" exclaimed Walmer: "Murderer, without the courage to commit the crime with the danger of the punishment—a breaker of the most solemn oaths, and yet calling yourself a gentleman and a man of honour—a legislator of your country, and yet the first to violate its most sacred laws, which you profess to uphold—an Englishman, and disgracing the name by violated pledges and foul falsehoods—a man, and the destroyer of those whom human nature intended you to protect, and stamping thy innocent offspring with the stain of illegitimacy. Go, and bear thy punishment with thee in the memory of this scene and in the curses of these aged parents. Go, and look back upon that path of life which thou hast paved with broken hearts and violated oaths. Go, and——"

He was proceeding in this malediction, when hurried footsteps were heard in the garden; they approached the house,

—suddenly, the window was pushed open, and a female, whose dishevelled hair and disordered dress could not conceal her beauty, entered the room and rushed towards Leslie, screaming, in Italian, "Oh, save me! save me! He is here—he is come—he follows me—he will not believe me innocent!"

"Who?" demanded Leslie, roused to animation by her appearance.

"My husband—your friend—Villars!! Save me! Explain that I am not the guilty being he thinks me!" she frantically exclaimed—"thou knowest that I am not."

Leslie started—"Ha! is it so?—is he here?"

"I will save you," uttered Walmer, in a voice of thunder—"save you from the precipice upon which you stand—save you from the demon who has plotted your destruction. Look here!" and he almost dragged her to the couch—"look here! this is one of his victims. Look upon it, and tremble! For such will you soon be if you believe in him!"

She cast one hurried glance upon the corpse, uttered a piercing scream, and fainted in Walmer's arms.

Leslie looked for a moment upon the whole group, and rushed through the window into the garden, to the encounter which he knew awaited him with his betrayed friend, Frederick Villars.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE DUEL.

CLER. Why we must fight; I know it, and long for't;
It was apparent in the fiery eye
Of young Verdone.—
I think there is no nation under heaven
That cut their enemies' throats with compliment
And such fine tricks as we do.

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

LESLIE rushed through the casement that had been left open by the last unexpected visitant, and dashing over plants and flowers, leaped the wicket into the road. The balmy fresh-

ness of the night-breeze a little relieved the heat of his brain; but still he rushed on for a few minutes like the chafed lion escaped from the toils of the hunter, but still smarting under his wounds. Stung almost to madness by the severity of the lesson he had received, and struggling against the remorse which had for a moment taken possession of his heart; and inflicted a pang which he had never felt before, he yet could not conquer his desire of vengeance on that being who had so frequently crossed his will, and who had now for the first time been seen and identified; and he was angry with himself that he had permitted the superiority of virtue, and the overwhelming and imposing manners of the stranger, to have had such power over him.

"What have I seen," exclaimed he, "but pictures; and that which is as insensible as a picture—a corpse! Why should the sight of a single dead body have this effect on one who has stood surrounded by thousands, some of them the victims of his own hand! She would have died had she never known me. It was her own foolish prejudiced scruples that killed her, and not I. This arises from the absurdity of the laws, from the prejudices of education, not from me." And thus he went on arguing against his own feelings—arguing against his own awakened conscience, and trying by the opiates of sophistry to lull it once more asleep.

"There's Villars, too; he must turn into one of the devils come to torment me.—Why did the fool trust me? He might have trusted me with his life—his fortune: nay, to have preserved either for him, I would have braved any danger. But why did he trust me with his wife?"

"Because he was an idiot, and did not think thee quite such an infernal villain as he has proved thee," exclaimed a voice; and immediately a tall dark figure leaped from a side path into the main-road, and Villars stood before him.

The sight of Villars turned the agitation of Leslie in a moment into his usual *sang-froid*.

"Ha, Fred! well met—the quickest work is the best. Between friends, the less ceremony the better. I know what I owe thee; and you know I am ever found willing to pay every debt I owe in the world, whether their payment draw upon my fortune or my life."

"I know, Leslie, that thou art a faithless scoundrel—I know, Leslie, that there is no tie, however sacred, that will

bind thee : that friendship, honour, virtue, all are sacrificed by the hellish selfishness of thy predominant passion."

" Hard words, Fred—hard words—Friendship ! why true, we have been friends ; but as to honour and virtue, dost think these words sound better from your lips than from mine ?"

" This is trifling, sir—I know thee."

" Well, Fred, and you knew me before. You have known me all my life : from my infancy, when we were whipped by the same nurse ; in our boyhood, when we played the same games ; in our manhood, when we have fought, drunk, and intrigued together : aye, Fred, to this moment, when we stand determined to cut each other's throats, or blow out each other's brains—which is it to be ? the choice is thine."

" I have my pistols with me ; you are as much accustomed to them as I am."

" True, Fred, those same pistols have served my turn before this, when you were my second instead of my adversary. They will be the fit, though not the silent witnesses of our meeting ; and here comes La Tour, who shall evidence our fair play, should any awkward occurrence terminate our interview ; for I can never forget that C—— was hanged for shooting his man without a witness.

Leslie's apparent coolness stung Villars to the quick ; and boiling with rage, he was giving vent to a tissue of execrations, when he was interrupted by Leslie, who stopped him by saying—

" Tush—tush, Fred, this is unmanly. Thy pistols will do quite as much execution without all these hard words. Thy passion, man, will never give thy bullet a truer aim, or add one atom of weight to the lead of which it is composed. We have lived as friends ; let us part like gentlemen."

By this time La Tour had attained the spot where Leslie and Villars stood. He had followed in the faint hope of being of some use as a mediator : for the talents which La Tour had displayed in intrigue, and which had been equally at the service of both the friends, together with the many secrets of which he was from necessity the participator, had bred a familiarity which had often transformed the valet into the appearance of the friend and confidant ; and the following his advice had frequently saved them from needlessly plunging into scrapes.

The moment, however, that he caught his master's eye, and saw in the moonlight the cool determination expressed in his countenance, and heard the almost unnatural calmness of his voice, as he opposed his bantering arguments to the boiling passion of Villars, La Tour saw that all intervention was useless.

He could not think that men, who had together and separately been engaged in so many intrigues, who had made a mere pastime of seductions, in which the very circumstances which tended to aggravate the crime, frequently added to the piquancy of the adventure, and who had never spoken of women but as the mere playthings of their passions, would seriously cut each other's throats for the result of such an adventure as this. He had frequently overheard them jest at the folly of men who hazarded their lives for a jilt, at the moment that they determined so to *ménager* their skill, either with the sword or pistol, as to prevent any fatal accident to the poor lover, or husband, or brother, who had called them to the field.

La Tour's feelings on these subjects were quite foreign, and of course quite accordant with these expressions of his master's; and he was yet to learn, that what they might consider a jest with regard to others, was only the more bitterly felt when it came home to themselves.

In addition to all the natural feelings which Villars, under the circumstances, might be supposed to feel as a husband, there was also, unconsciously even to himself, a mortification at the superior address of Leslie: for their lives had for several years past been little more than a *lutte*, as to which should do the most daring and the most profligate things; and he winced under the galling idea, that he was now himself become the subject of those bitter sarcasms and biting jests, with which Leslie had treated other husbands in similar predicaments.

La Tour, therefore, saw at once that all intervention was useless; he could only cast an appealing glance, first at one, and then at the other, as they stood at an arm's length distance: the calm face and easy attitude of Leslie, strongly contrasted with the flushed and angry countenance and energetic position which the roused passion of Villars presented.

His hands were extended, in the act of offering one of the pistols to Leslie; while the other was grasped with a trem-

bling hand, that endangered the discharge of one of Wogden's hair-triggers.

"Take the pistol—take the pistol!" exclaimed, or rather bellowed, Villars; "lest I do myself summary justice, and inflict my vengeance without giving you your *gentlemanly* chance of escape. Take it. They are equally good. You know there is no choice between them, and I do not offer it."

"Why, Fred, you are mad: what, here in the high-road, within pistol-shot of the village! why, man, you would wake the whole neighbourhood, and perhaps make discoveries——. But I will not jest; La Tour, take the pistols from Mr. Villars; follow us, and be silent."

He saw La Tour was going to speak; and he was in that peculiar frame of mind that he felt he could not have borne the sound of any voice but his own, or the passionate one of Villars, which as it increased in vehemence and abuse, only added to his own calmness.

He led the way into a grove on his left, and in a moment they were enveloped in the dark shade of the trees; and Villars and La Tour could only follow by the sound which Leslie made, as he pushed his way through the brushwood.

A few moments brought them to a patch of light, admitted by a part of the forest having been cleared away; and here their figures were again visible, throwing their shadows in dark and distinct outlines on the ground. Another copse, broken through in the same manner by Leslie, who acted as the pioneer, brought them to the commencement of an open country in a small field forming a gently inclined plain, the top of which bounded the horizon, and seemed to be the line of division between the earth and the sky. It is only in the brightness of moonlight that this line, which seems to our optics the world's boundary, appears so near to us.

"Here, Fred," exclaimed Leslie, "is a proper place: and this, as the Irishmen say, the "wicked time" for an affair of this sort, when the white and steady light of the moon renders every object more distinct; when there is not a breath of wind to render your eye for a moment uncertain, nor a sunbeam to intercept the true course of a bullet."

"No more words, sir."

"Nay, Fred, you know words are my forte; and I must and will have my way." Here he looked with the eye of a scientific duellist over the field. "You know you have no friend in this affair to choose your ground; and your pas-

ions do not leave you in a fit state to choose it for yourself. You have trusted me with this office before, and you must again."

"Quick, Sir; no foolery."

"I mean none, Fred," replied Leslie; and gently tossing his glove down, "There, Fred—there 's the best position in the field; and at ten paces, in the direction of the hill, shall be mine: take your ground. La Tour, *les pistolets*."

Villars almost mechanically placed himself in the spot designated by Leslie; and casting his eyes around, he perceived that he was so placed that the copse formed a dark back-ground, in which his figure was partly lost, so as entirely to preclude that distinctness of outline which the moon would otherwise have given to it.

La Tour approached. He had been several times in attendance with his two masters, when their adventures had terminated in a duel; but these events had always been treated by the friends as such matters of course, and with such a kind of chivalric badinage, that they had always been divested of their terror; and their having in almost every instance returned home as sound and whole as they had gone out, had almost impressed him with the idea that they bore "charmed lives, that would not yield to one of woman born." But now it was different: they were opposed to each other; and on one side with a feeling so intemperate, that nothing less than blood, perhaps than life, could satisfy it.

Perceiving as he gave up the pistols, that he trembled and looked agitated—"Qu'est-ce que c'est, La Tour?" said Leslie, "tu ne perdras pas tes deux maîtres au même temps: il t'en restera un, et tu seras bien placé, vienne ce que pourra: ainsi, que diable importe à toi l'événement?"

La Tour could not speak; but he took a pinch of snuff, that never-failing resource of a Frenchman, in all situations and under all circumstances, and mechanically gave his usual shrug.

"Tenez," continued Leslie, "prenez ce mouchoir," giving him a white one, "Marchez quarante pas à la gauche; et le moment que tu me vois sur ma position en face de Monsieur Villars, faites tomber le mouchoir." Then turning to Villars, "It is not so pleasant a use for a handkerchief as that to which the Grand Signor puts his handkerchief. Mais c'est égal. Let that, Villars, be the signal for firing. It is really hard to be obliged to be master of the ceremonies, and

dance into the bargain. What, does he hesitate to be our fugleman? Vîte, La Tour, ou——"

But La Tour, with mechanical obedience, had started for his forty paces.

"And now, Villars, thank me. Had I permitted you to have your own way amidst the first ebullition of your passion, that very passion would have foiled your purpose, our affair had by this time been over; and I should have done all that was necessary as a man of honour, and have been supping as safely as though no passionate husband had pulled trigger on me. Now you are cool and collected, and now you may do yourself justice. But before we part, this one word of advice—not my own—for to that perhaps you would not attend. But still remember—

> Friendship is constant in all other things,
> Save in the office and affairs of love:
> Therefore all hearts in love, use their own tongues;
> Let every eye negociate for itself,
> And trust no agent: for beauty is a witch,
> Against whose charms faith melteth into blood.

He placed the pistol in Villars' hand, and held out the other, which was scornfully and passionately rejected. Leslie then turned round, and striding ten paces, leisurely took up his position, in spite of finding that the upper line of the acclivity left his head and shoulders above it, relieved only by the clear blue sky, and of course giving a frightful advantage to the aim of his adversary.

He gazed on the calm sky for a moment before he turned round; and La Tour watched his movements with an intense anxiety, that wished for the power of extending every moment to an hour.

It was a strange sight to La Tour, to behold two men whom he had never before seen opposite to each other, but in the most social and intimate intercourse, indulging all the gayety and profligacy of youth over their Champagne, and only striving which should outvie the other in the adventures he recited.—It was strange to see two men who had done nothing through life but laugh together, now standing face to face, with deadly weapons in their hands, and deadly vengeance on one side, and cool and indomitable determination on the other.

Leslie turned round. The eyes of both parties were fixed

on La Tour. The handkerchief dropped. The loud report broke upon the stillness of the night—and was repeated by a hundred echoes.

La Tour had closed his eyes when he gave the signal. He reopened them the moment he heard the discharge, and a rush of pleasure came over his heart as he saw both the parties standing in the same position. The hand of Villars was extended, with his pistol pointed at Leslie, whose arm hung by his side, still holding the weapon.

This relief to the excited feelings of La Tour was, however, but momentary, as Leslie evidently showed a difficulty in keeping his position. The pistol dropped from his relaxed hold—he staggered a pace or two backwards, and fell to the ground.

The moment Villars saw him fall he dashed his pistol to the earth, and rushed to the spot. La Tour was on his knees at his master's head an instant after. Leslie lay extended at full length. The contortions of his body showed the agonies which he suffered; and the compression of his lips, one of which he held tightly between his teeth, displayed the struggles he was making against the influence of pain. His eyes were closed, his hands clenched, and large drops of perspiration hung upon his forehead.

As Villars gazed upon his pale face old associations revived in his bosom; he recollected the years—the many years of their intimate intercourse; he pictured to himself the many times he had seen the countenance which now lay before him apparently in the agonies of death, lighted up with wit, fun, and frolic, the delight of his companions, and of none more than Villars himself; he remembered his gallant bearing in the field; and his memory was cursed with the most vivid recollection that he once owed his own life to him whom he had now deprived of it, and though this benefit had been returned in kind, it was still a debt of gratitude. He thought, too, that he had known Leslie all his life, and that the object which had occasioned their present disastrous meeting, although his wife, was but the acquaintance of a few months; and in those few he had trusted his honour in her keeping, and he imagined she had sacrificed it.

As these thoughts came crowding thickly one upon the other, his desire of revenge subsided—his passion gradually melted into softness—remorse stole into his heart, for the

sacrifice which his honour had required, and he called in a voice almost amounting to agony upon Leslie.

"Leslie—Leslie—Leslie!" said he, raising his voice with each repetition of the name, "Leslie—my friend—Leslie——"

Leslie opened his eyes: he still struggled with his pain; and his spirit—his indomitable spirit for a moment mastered it. "Fred—you need not—call so loud.—My—my—spirit—or whatever it is that is—to go from me—has not gone so far on its way—yet—but that it hears thee.—La Tour—pansez—pansez bien—ou la vie s'écoulera—avec—avec—le sang—arrêtez-les—tous les deux."

They now, for the first time, perceived the blood issuing in a stream from the lower part of his left side. In an instant his clothes were removed from the part by La Tour, who, to his other accomplishments, adding a little skill in surgery, applied his handkerchief to the wound, and by pressing his hand very tightly over it, stopped for a moment the first effusion of blood.

"C'est bien—pressez—pressez—donc—La Tour—Fred—you—have shot me in an awkward place—I would not have served you so.—Oh!—I would have picked—out any button—and—and—would n't have missed it—; but my pistol—is—loaded—loaded—still.—Thank God—for that —— Eh!—what—did—I—say—who did I thank?

At this information a feeling of deep mortification and deeper sorrow smote the heart of Villars.

"Oh!" continued Leslie, "that I could act Mercutio.—But I 'm not come to that.—Séchez tes larmes—La Tour.—Don't look so grave, Fred.—It is n't so bad.—'Tis nothing—after—all—but—a bullet—and though—your awkwardness—Oh! Fred—always raise your pistol—and never—never lower it, as you did just now."

He sunk back nearly exhausted, and La Tour tore his own shirt-sleeve off to replace the piece of linen that had been first applied, and which was now completely saturated with blood.

Villars could not speak; he held his hand, and returned its feeble pressure.

Leslie again opened his eyes; he fixed them upon the countenance of Villars; he there read his regained ascendancy over his old associate; and that vanity which had made him glory in leading and misleading all the spirits by

whom he was surrounded, glimmered faintly in his heart, and even in this awful moment, quivering between life and death, trembling between time and eternity, he thought more about preserving the fearless and reckless gayety of his character, and of dying like Mercutio, than of summoning his fortitude from a better source and for a better purpose.

"Fred," said he, "I would ask your forgiveness; but—but—I am not—I have not——;" here he struggled stoutly with his agony, nor suffered it to be perceptible through any other means than the perspiration which hung upon his forehead, in large globules;—"I would say—Fred, that your wife—" Villars started from him at the word—"is innocent—pure—for me;" seeing Villars' doubting countenance, "it is true—true—true—I deceived her into her temporary absence."

"Oh, Leslie! did I dare believe you; did I dare trust your words! Upon all other points I know your lips never uttered a falsehood; but upon these—" he stopped.

"You think—I never uttered—a truth—eh, Fred?" thus Leslie finished the sentence for him. "How can I convince you? Shall I swear? alas! have we not so often laughed at every thing sacred, that there is nothing left by which to swear, with any hope that you might think I respected it; but by the word of a Leslie, which was never forfeited to man," and his energy gave him a momentary strength, "I assure you I speak that which is the fact."

He read in Villars' eye his conviction of the truth of his statement; and again the lighter part of his character assumed his ascendancy, and pulling Villars towards him, he continued, "Yes, Villars, 'tis true—your wife has many—many—many good points:" he groaned—"and recollect—that nothing—is—quite—perfect. You know the proverb I have quoted to you before—

> Al molino ed alla sposa
> Sempre manca qualche cosa."

And he smiled, as he saw Villars wince under the remark.

"We had better take some steps to remove him," said Villars to La Tour, who thought from his closed eyes that he had fainted.

"No—no—not yet. It will produce fever. Let me lie—the air revives me;" and he seemed to derive fresh vigour from it.

Villars still urged the immediate removal, or that La Tour should go for a surgeon; but Leslie would not permit either. He remarked, if any thing should happen while left alone with Villars, it might have an awkward appearance." On Villars still pressing, he said, "Come—come, Fred; it is n't fair—one can't argue so freely with a bullet in one's body. Besides, you must fly; you must go and protect your wife. and I have something more to say—all the rest I will write; for I fear you have given me plenty of leisure. Fred—Fred—it was your own fault. You—you put it in my head first—years ago—and my devil has been egging me on—ever since. Why did you trust me?"

"Our long friendship!" exclaimed Villars.

"Friendship! aye, Pylades and Orestes—Damon and Pythias. But, Fred, there was no Mistress Orestes: no Mistress Pythias—depend upon it." Here he groaned, in spite of his utmost efforts—"there were no pretty wives in the case;" La Tour wiped his forehead; "but yours is innocent." A sudden thought seemed to come over him, and produced a smile. "I say, Fred," he continued, "you must n't let Mrs. Villars think the worse of me for this circumstance; it must n't be known, lest I should lose my character." Again a groan forced its way into utterance. "And I say, Fred, pray apo—apologise for me to her—for—having given her so—much—trouble, and for having brought her so far—so far—for——nothing!" and he fainted from excess of agony.

Villars and La Tour took advantage of his insensibility, and binding his wound as well as circumstances would permit, they bore him gently to the inn, from which Villars, convinced of the innocence of his wife, both by the confession of Leslie and her own explanation, instantly departed, arranging with La Tour how he should communicate the result of his master's wound.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE CONCLUSION.

Aye, but to die, and go we know not where;
To lie in cold obstruction and to rot:
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod.
——— ——— ———'Tis too horrible!
The weariest and most loathed worldly life,
That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment,
Can lay on nature, is a Paradise
To what we fear of death.

SHAKSPEARE.

THE circumstances which had led to the rencontre detailed in the last chapter were simply these:—From the time that Leslie had ceased to persecute Agnes he had, in company with Villars, pursued his former career in different parts of the Continent, until the latter had fallen desperately in love with a young Venetian lady, and finding it impossible to compass his ends by any other means, had actually married her.

Called by his affairs so suddenly to Paris, that he could not take his wife, he placed her under the care of a part of her family in Italy, and proceeded on his route, accompanied by Leslie. This made the separation easier, as he felt in spite of all their friendship, that he could not trust Leslie in his absence. Unfortunately Leslie guessed this, and the demon which was always tempting him, suggested to his mind the idea of feigning illness at Geneva, for the purpose of making Villars proceed without him. This Villars was compelled to do, Leslie promising to follow immediately, or to wait his return there. The moment, however, that the whip of Villars' postilion was out of hearing, La Tour was summoned —and away posted Leslie back to his friend's wife. The intimacy in which they had lived afforded him every opportunity—till what she had at first received as mere gallantries assumed a more serious meaning. Nothing, however, had

entered her mind and heart contrary to the duty of a wife; and Leslie was obliged to have recourse to stratagem to get her into his power. He forged a letter from Villars, saying he was taken ill on his return homeward, and desiring his wife to come under the escort of Leslie to join him. The plan succeeded; nor had she discovered the deception till their arrival at the little inn. Villars in the mean time, finding Leslie had departed the moment he had quitted him, suspecting his intriguing disposition, pushed on with redoubled speed—arrived just after the flight of Leslie, immediately pursued him, and overtook him as before described.

In spite of the agony which Leslie had experienced from his wound, and although he had talked of death with a view of showing his fearless recklessness of it, he had no idea in his own mind that he was in any great danger, and imagined that nothing more was necessary than the extraction of the ball and a little pain to put him once more in a fair train of recovery. He had seen such gun-shot wounds cured during his military service in the Peninsula, that he had acquired a habit of never thinking them mortal till the sufferer was actually dead; and he could not believe that a mere pistol-bullet, which had not actually entered a vital part, could be fraught with death.

Surgeons were immediately sent for from all the nearest towns, and the process of extracting the ball immediately commenced; but whether from the awkwardness of the professors, or from the direction the bullet had taken, it eluded all their skill, and the only result was the increased fever of the patient.

This circumstance, together with the symptoms by which the wound was accompanied, induced his medical attendants to inform him of their dread of a fatal result. Leslie would not believe them, and attempted to ridicule them either as indulging groundless fears, or from their want of surgical skill. But the grave and pale face of La Tour soon convinced him that there was more in their fears than he dared acknowledge; and, for the first time, the idea of death came over him, accompanied by an impatience, and a dread which he was ashamed to show, and which he attempted to allay by his old habit of writing to Villars. Stretched on a couch therefore that commanded a beautiful view of the surrounding country from the window, for he would not go to bed: at every interval of pain, he wrote as follows:—

LESLIE TO VILLARS (written at intervals).

Fred—Fred, I always told you, you were never a sure shot. I little thought though that I should have lived to prove it as I do now. Why—why, would you never take my advice and practice? If you had done so—and I am to die—why you might have done my business at once; and not thus unskilfully have left me to linger, and die, as it were, by inches. This body of mine, being literally the field in which life and death are struggling for the mastery, but life shall conquer. For to die—die—and be no more! No more to see that sun, which even now throws a bright gleam across my paper; no more to see those green fields which smile through the windows, pleasanter than I ever recollect them; no more to look at the buoyant wave sparkling in the sunbeams; no more to laugh, and enjoy, and——aye, a thousand recollections press upon me—but to die. Surely the little hole thy cursed bullet has made, can never let out all this load of life. Surely all these warm pulses—this flowing blood—these internal and external evidences of health and strength which have borne me on so proudly, can never evaporate through an orifice that never was a quarter of an inch diameter; and of which there is scarcely a mark to be seen. It cannot—it *shall* not be. Oh! ——— There—there was a groan; a groan, Fred, of agony. It seems to tell me that I *shall* die; but it lies—and the infernal leeches lie, with their grave looks, and their shaking heads, and their cast-up eyes. Zounds! of what use are the quacking tribe, if they cannot keep life in while it is ebbing out? I can keep myself alive, when I am well; and if I had not thy cursed bullet in me—oh!——who would have thought that I—of such a mercureal consistency, that I seemed to have a natural antipathy to lead—should now be——— I wish our Peninsular friend F— was here with his forceps! —The bullet would be out in a twinkling, and I should be well—But these Italian fools ——— Oh!—I can't go on; but I will not die—I can't: surely there is no reason that I should; and the physicians *do* lie—don't they, Fred?

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That fellow, La Tour, has just been here, with his pale face, and hollow sunken eye—the very reverse of his former

self; and what do you think he wanted? Faith, nothing; but to persuade me to have a priest—a priest, forsooth—a physician for the soul—a rascal with an absolution to be purchased for a few pauls—a fellow professing to make up my long account; and to balance it with a wet wafer and a Latin *Salvo Domine.*

Fred, if there be an account to be rendered! Fred, if there be a day of judgment! Fred, if there be a hereafter! both you and I shall need a much longer time than these stupid doctors tell me is now allotted to me in this world to settle our accounts. Ages—ages, Fred, would scarcely be enough, if those which we have called pleasures are crimes; if those which we have——But nonsense; it is impossible, and I'll not believe it; and if I am to die, why, for my own comfort, I will die in the same sentiments that I have preached and lived.

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I have been used to will, and to do, all my life; and never recollect saying I WILL, that I did not. Is then the power of volition to fail me only now, when I say I will live? No—no, life is strong within me. These physicians judge by their own emaciated fragile bodies: they have no idea how much such a firm-knit, athletic frame as mine can suffer; and yet the devils tell me I shall die: and as they pronounced the fiat, a legion of other devils seemed to enter, and riot in my mind; and appeared to dance about me, laughing and chattering, with a kind of hellish joy, as though it were to welcome me Where—where—*where*, to welcome me?

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Die—impossible! what I, with thousands of acres of fair, unencumbered estate? How many thousands are there, Fred? you know. But to my mind they, at this moment, appear; while I am, as it were, looking back at them, diminished to a speck. Though if they were but a speck, yet give me that speck, and let me cling to it so long as it is on this side of ——— of what? I know not; my pen wanders with my mind, and I know not where either of them are going to. But is it reasonable—is it just? No—no, it cannot be, that I

—in the possession of thousands of acres of land, forest, and water; of woodland, and hill, and dale, and villages, and fields full of every living thing—should be reduced to a narrow spot of six feet by two. That I, the owner of a princely mansion, with halls full of ancestors, and saloons full of costly furniture, should be shut up in a deal box, without even a hole to breathe through. Shut up close—faugh! how my soul sickens: soul—*did* I say soul? And yet those very ancestors possessed the same estates, the same mansions; and they, and their all, are contained within these narrow limits. This comes like a damning fact—

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But at thirty-two—why my lease cannot be out yet. Had I sold myself to the devil, as Doctor Faustus did, I should have had a longer term than this; and he would not have dared to foreclose so soon. Even the devil, with all his impatience, would have thought my present course too short, and would not have stopped it for years to come! Even for his own sake.

Dost remember when we read Lucretius, and used to fancy the bodies through which these souls of ours had passed, or those into which they might pass—when these bodies of ours had done with them, or rather when those indescribable things called souls—if there be such things—had done with our bodies? Well, Fred, I have been trying—aye, trying with all my might—to think this dream of Pythagoras—this metempsychosis—true; and I have been searching my chamber with a lynx eye to discover some living creature watching for the departure of this soul of mine—some living tenement to receive it, if it is really tired of filling the body of Robert Leslie. Oh! Fred, I would consent to be anything—anything, so that it had life in it—anything, so that it had air to breathe—eyes to look out of, and limbs to move.—Aye! a mouse, or even a toad—the thing I loathe most on earth. Yet, to be certain that this soul of mine were to be compressed into the venomous compass of a toad—to drag its spotted belly through the green waters of the stagnant pool, and live on slime, and spit my venom on the flowers in my own gardens; or what would be more natural, at the next heir, as he walked among them—would be delight—would be joy unutterable—to the uncer-

tainty—uncertainty ! and am I come to this ?—Is it uncertainty ?—Is there a chance, the remotest chance that these drivelling priests speak truth !—If there be, Fred——Oh there 's a pang! Curses on thy bullet, Fred ——

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These physicians are fools—drivellers : they say I must sleep ; and one of their cursed potions has procured me an hour of hellish refreshment. But I am awake—yes, awake once more ; and it was but a dream—a thing to laugh at—a thing that we have laughed at together. I am awake ; and in opening my eyes to all the realities about me, though those realities are grave doctors, pale faces, hopeless countenances, they are heaven to the hell I have just quitted in awaking. Fred, I dreamed I was in a beautiful garden. Every where flowers bloomed around me, and beneath my feet, fresh and fair to look at, blooming as though Nature had just painted them, and sent them forth spangled with dew to scent the morning air ; and I felt, Fred, young again—felt as you and I used to feel when we were boys, and chased the butterflies at Eaton. Ha ! that twinge !

Oh, that we had never chased any thing but butterflies ! But we have, Fred. Well, I felt an indescribable longing for every flower that I saw, and I stretched forth my hand to pluck them ; and as I plucked them one by one, they withered in my touch : but I still grasped and grasped, on this side and on that ; but every one faded, one after the other ; and the green grass and the bright daisies withered under my feet, as I proceeded, till I looked back, and all that was gay before was one blank scorched-up desert—and I felt a sense of desolation. Suddenly the desolation changed ; and I found myself—how I cannot tell—in that paradise of Mahomet, which, in our hours of folly, we always used to think was such a charming thought of the prophetic hypocrite ; and made us cease to wonder at the rapidity with which, in his early career, he made proselytes to his faith. And there were women—beautiful women ! the bane of both of us, Fred—flitting about in all the loose attire of eastern costume, amidst the shady groves and bowers of roses with which the place was filled, and all the passions of my nature —those fiery passions—but you know them—seemed roused

my loss of blood was not felt in my sleep; and I pursued, and caught in my out-stretched arms a lovely form, that resisted me no more when it felt my warm arms entwined around it. It turned, and I beheld Fanny! lovely as when we first knew her, with her blue eyes and flaxen tresses; and I had all the feelings of former times; and there was every thing about her that is lovely in woman —the soft lip—the heaving bosom—the rounded form; and I pressed her to my heart, when suddenly the cheeks assumed a livid hue—the eyes became sunken, yellow, and lustreless—the heaving bosom shrunk into ungainly folds—the firm flesh seemed to soften into disease, and she sunk a corpse out of my arms on to the ground. Still the same burning passions seemed to drive me on, and I caught one lovely form after another, only to *feel* them *die*—do you understand that?—to *feel* them die: aye! even as Othello seems to do when hanging over Desdemona, he feels pulse by pulse slacken and evaporate, till he appears to have taken leave of the world, and all the life it contains in the words—"She is dead."

And thus one after another failed me. Beauty turned to blackness, life into death, at my touch, as the flowers had done before; and yet there remained the same fiery determination to pursue—the same burning impetus to urge me onward. At length but one remained; and she fled from my pursuit—and faster and stronger than all the rest. But I came up with her, and it was—"Agnes!" Let me breathe at the name, or rather let me shudder. It was Agnes, all that I remember her—the loveliest I had seen; and she smiled upon me, and talked peace and comfort to me, and my heart seemed to forget all that had gone before. And my arms were once more around her, and her head drooped upon my breast, and I pressed her closely, and her kerchief fell in the slight struggle; and I stooped my lips to press them upon her bosom, when, to my horror, as I breathed upon it, it turned black—black; and a huge serpent seemed to be coiling round its beauties, and covering them with his venom; and I looked up, and her face was fleshless—her sockets were eyeless—her teeth were lipless: the arms that were around me were mere bones; and the fingers that pressed mine were thin strings of sinews, still warm and wet with the flesh that had just fallen from them, and upon which myriads of worms were preying in a grave which yawned at

my feet; and I heard a laugh, and a voice, and I looked into the grave, and it was Trevor, calling upon me to bring his wife; and she obeyed the call; and I could not disentangle myself from her firm grasp, but was forced forward, till we fell—fell—fell, into the loathsome grave together; and I awoke—awoke, and found this earth a heaven! Fred, if there be a hell, I have been there; and these doctors, these dolts, would have me sleep. Oh! I hope I shall never sleep again. I would rather invent some machine to prop my eyes open, than take their cursed opiates to damn me before my time.—If I am to die, I will die waking.

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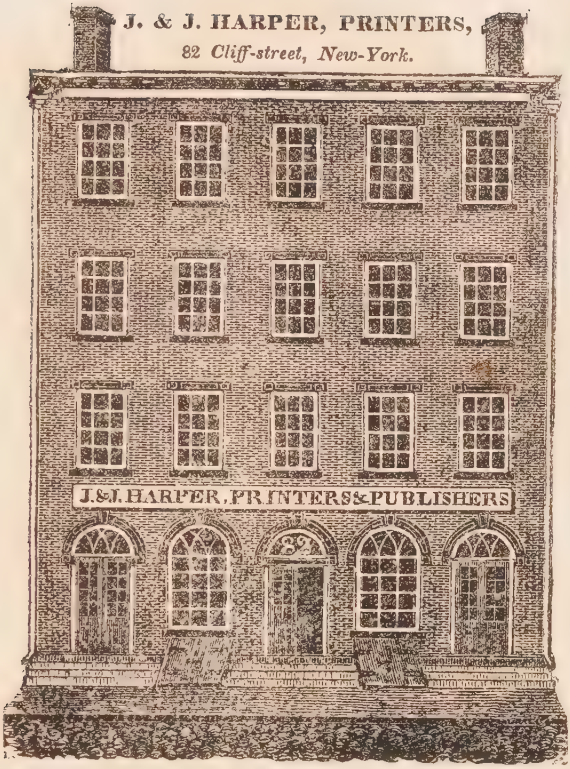
Fred, I have been trying to summon to my aid all the arguments of those philosophers in whom we used so much to delight, from the ancients down to Voltaire and Rousseau; and my mind has clung with an indescribable tenacity to all those which were wont to be so convincing to us in the heyday of our enjoyments, and they are all fresh in my memory. I can repeat them every word; but it is all in vain: all their strength, all their seeming truth, seems to elude my grasp, like the phantoms in my dream. As I catch at them, and attempt to hang my faith upon them, they all dissolve one after another into airy nothingness, and all at the word *death*. This magic word seems to dispel all those dreams of philosophy, upon the truth of which we so securely pinned our faith. DEATH! how I hate the word; and yet, if I look through my window, I see it written in gigantic characters on the broad blue sky. If I look round my chamber, I see it inscribed like the fate of Belshazzar on the walls, and printed in the pale faces of my physicians and servants. If I bury my face in my pillow, I see it there—death!—death!—DEATH!—nothing but DEATH written every where. Who would think that five simple letters could produce a word with so much terror in it! Oh!———

THE END.

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